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DECEMBER, 1932

WEIRD TALES

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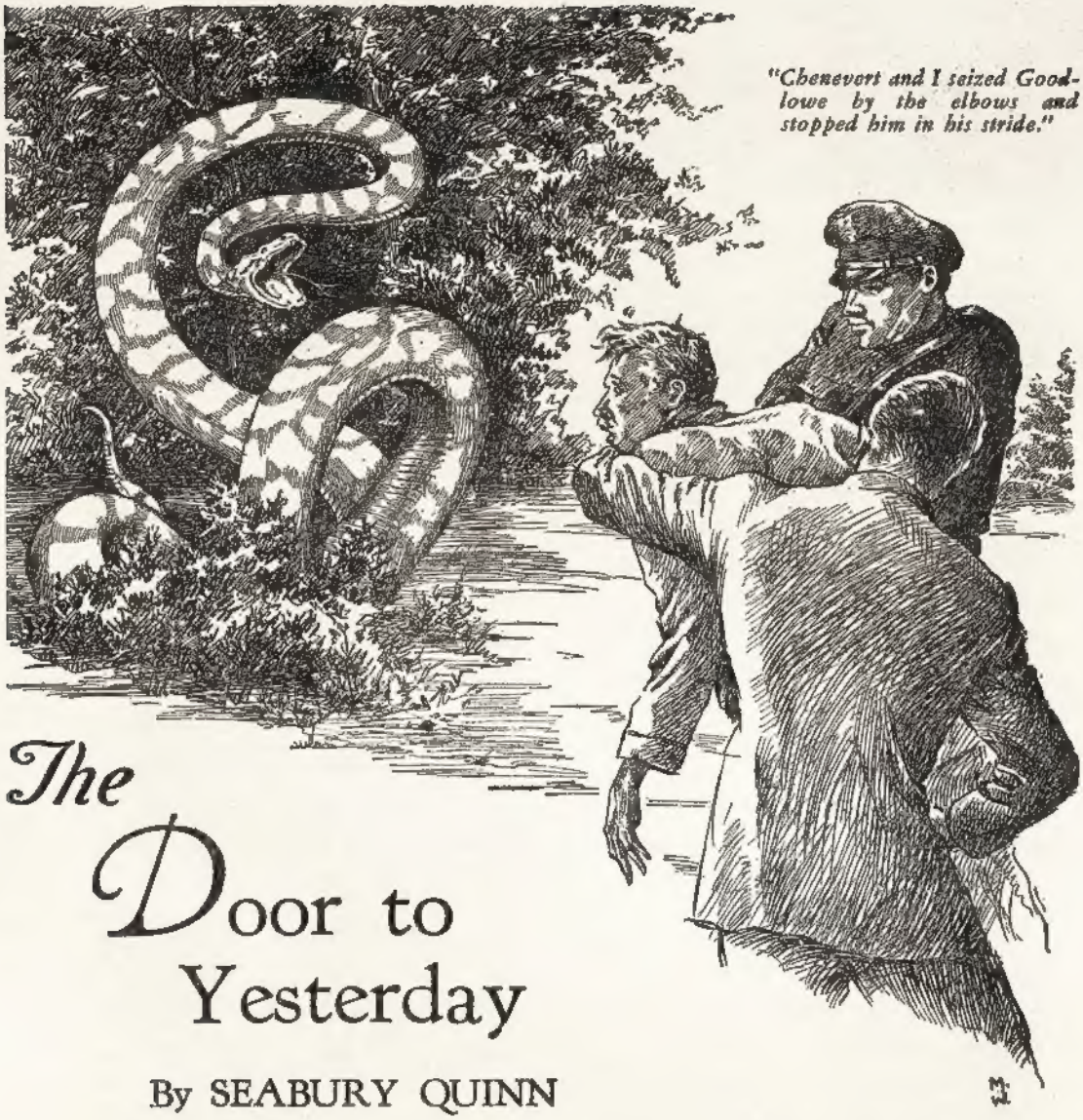

"Chenevert and I seized Goodlowe by the elbows and stopped him in his stride."

The Door to Yesterday

By SEABURY QUINN

'A gripping tale of a great white snake, weird deaths, and strange racial memories—an exploit of Jules de Grandin

DINNER would be ready in fifteen minutes, and we were to have lobster Cardinal, a thing Jules de Grandin loved with a passion second only to his fervor for *La Marseillaise*. Now he was engaged in the rite of cocktail-mixing, intent upon his work as any alchemist brewing an esoteric philtre. "Now for the vermouth," he announced, decanting a potion of amber liquid into the tall silver shaker half filled with gin and fine-shaved ice with all the care of a pharmacist compounding a prescription. "One drop too little and the cocktail she is spoiled; one little so small drop too much, and she is wholly ruined. Ah—so; she is now precisely perfect, and ready for the shaking!" Slowly, rhythmically, he began to churn the shaker up and down, gradually increasing the speed in time with the bit of bawdy ballad which he hummed:

Ma fille, pour pénitence,
Ron, ron, ron, petit patapon,
Ma fille, pour pénitence,
Nous nous embrasserons——

"Captain Chenevert; Misther Gordon Goodlowe!" announced Nora McGinnis, my household factotum, from the study doorway, annoyance at having strangers call when dinner was about to be served showing on her broad Irish face.

On the heels of her announcement came the callers: Captain Chenevert, a big, deep-chested young man attired in that startling combination of light and dark blues in which the State of New Jersey garbs its gendarmerie; Mr. Goodlowe, a dapper, slender little man with neatly cropped white hair and short-clipped white mustache, immaculate in black mohair jacket and trousers, his small paunch trimly buttoned underneath a waistcoat of spotless linen.

"Sorry to interrupt you, gentlemen," Captain Chenevert apologized, "but there have been some things happening at Mr. Goodlowe's place which no one can explain, and one of my men got talking with a member of your local force—Detective Sergeant Costello—who said that Doctor de Grandin could get to the bottom of the trouble if anybody could."

"Eh, you say the good Costello sent you?" de Grandin asked, giving the cocktail mixer a final vigorous shake. "He should know better. Me, I am graduated from the *Sûreté;* I no longer take an interest in criminal investigation."

"We understood as much," the captain answered. "That's why we're here. If it had been a matter of ordinary crime-detection, or an extraordinary one, I think that we could handle it; but it's something more than that, sir." He paused and grinned rather sheepishly; then: "This may sound nutty to you, but I'm more than half convinced there's something supernatural about the case."

"Ah?" De Grandin put the cocktail shaker by. "U'm?" He flung a leg across the table-corner and, half sitting, half standing, regarded the visitors in turn with a fixed, unwinking stare. *"Ah-ha?* This is of interest," he admitted, breaking open a blue packet of "Maryland" cigarettes and setting one of the malodorous things aglow. "Proceed, if you please, gentlemen. Like the ass of Monsieur Balaam, I am all ears."

Mr. Goodlowe answered: "Last year my brother, Colonel Clarke Clay Goodlowe, sold his seat on the stock exchange and retired from active business," he began. "For some years he had contemplated returning to Kentucky, but when he finally gave up active trading in the market he found that he'd become acclimated to the North—reckon the poor fellow just couldn't bear to get more than an hour or two away from Wall Street, as a matter of fact—so he built himself a home near Keyport. He moved there with his daughter Nancy, my niece, last April, and died before he'd been there quite a month."

De Grandin's slender, jet-black eyebrows rose a fraction of an inch nearer the line of his honey-colored hair. "Very good, *Messieurs,*" he answered querulously. "Men have died before—men have been dying regularly since Mother Eve and Father Adam partook of the forbidden fruit. What is there so extraordinary in this especial death?"

"I didn't see my brother's body——" Mr. Goodlowe began.

"But I did!" Captain Chenevert broke in. "Every bone from skull to metatarsus was broken, and the whole form was so hammered out of shape that identification was almost impossible."

"Ah?" de Grandin's small blue eyes

flickered with renewing interest. "And then——"

Mr. Goodlowe took up the narrative: "My niece was almost prostrated by the tragedy, and as I was in England at the time it was impossible for me to join her right away. Accordingly, Major Derringer, a rather distant kinsman, and his wife came up from Lexington to attend the funeral and make such preliminary arrangements as were necessary until I could come home.

"The day following the funeral, Major Derringer was found on the identical spot where my brother's body was discovered—dead."

"Crushed and mauled almost out of resemblance to anything human," Captain Chenevert supplied.

"Mrs. Derringer was taken severely ill as a result of her husband's dreadful death," Mr. Goodlowe added. "She was put to bed with special nurses in attendance day and night, and while the night nurse was out of the room for a moment she rose and slipped through the window, wandered across the lawn in her nightclothes, and——"

The thing was like an antiphon. De Grandin looked inquiringly at Captain Chenevert as Mr. Goodlowe paused, and the trooper nodded grimly.

"The same," he snapped. "Same place, same dreadful mutilation—everything the same, except——"

"Yes, *parbleu,* except——" de Grandin prompted sharply as the young policeman paused.

"Except that Mrs. Derringer had bled profusely where compound fractures of her ribs had forced the bones through her sides, and on the tiled floor of the loggia near the spot where she was found was *the trail of a great snake marked in blood.*"

"Good heavens!" I exclaimed.

"By damn-it," murmured Jules de Grandin, "this is truly such a case as I delight in, *Monsieur le Capitaine.* If you gentlemen will be good enough to join us at dinner, I shall do myself the honor of accompanying you to this so strange house where guests are found all crushed to death and serpents write their autographs in blood. Yes, certainly; of course."

PROSPECT HILL, the late Colonel Goodlowe's house, was a reproduction of an English country seat done in the grand manner. Built upon a rise of ground, heading a little valley in the hills, it was a long, low red-brick mansion flanked by towering oaks and chestnut-trees. Leveled off before the house was a wide terrace paved with tesselated tiles and bordered by a stone balustrade punctuated at regular intervals by wide-mouthed urns of stone in which petunias blossomed riotously. A flight of broad, low steps ran down through succeeding terraced levels of smooth-shaved lawns to a lake where water-lilies bloomed and several swans swam lazily. Across a stretch of greensward to the left was a formal garden where statued nymphs stooped to beds of clustering roses which drenched the air with almost drugging sweetness. Low, colonnaded loggias, like cloisters, branched off from the house at either side, the left connecting with the rose-garden, the right leading to a level square of grass in which was set a little summer-house of red brick and wrought iron.

"One moment, if you please," de Grandin ordered as we clambered from the car before the house. "Show me, if you will be so good, *Monsieur le Capitaine,* exactly where it was they found Madame Derringer and the others. We

might as well prepare ourselves by making a survey of the terrain."

We walked across the lawn toward the little summer-house, and Captain Chenevert halted some six feet from the loggia. "I'd say we found 'em here," he answered. "U'm, yes; just about here, judging by the——" He paused a moment, as though to orient himself, then stepped forward to the green-tile paving of the loggia, drawing an electric flashlight from his blouse pocket as he did so.

The long summer twilight had almost faded into night, but by such daylight as remained, aided by the beam of Captain Chenevert's torch, we could descry, very faintly, a sinuating, weaving trail against the gray-green of the tiles. I recognized it instantly. There is no boy brought up in the country districts before the coming of the motor-car had caused earth roads to give way to hard-surfaced highways who can not tell a snake-track when he sees it in the dust!

But never had I seen a track like this. In form it was a duplicate of trails which I had seen a thousand times, but in size—it might have been the mark left by a motor-lorry's wheel. Involuntarily I shuddered as I beheld the grisly thing, and Captain Chenevert's hand stole instinctively to the walnut stock of the revolver which dangled in its holster from his belt. Gordon Goodlowe, scion of a dozen generations of a family who chose death in preference to dishonor, held himself in check by almost superhuman force. Jules de Grandin showed no more emotion than if he were in a museum viewing some not-especially interesting relic of the past.

"U'm?" he murmured softly to himself, studying the dull, reddish-brown tracing with pursed lips and narrowed eyes. "He must have been the *bisaïeul* of the serpents, this one." He raised his narrow shoulders in a shrug, and:

"Come, let us go in," he suggested. "Perhaps there is more to see inside."

Mr. Goodlowe cleared his throat angrily, but Captain Chenevert laid a quick hand on his elbow. "S-s-sh!" he cautioned softly. "Let him handle this his own way. He knows what he's about."

An aged, but by no means decrepit colored butler met us at the door. In one hand he held an old fashioned candle-lamp, in the other a saucer containing grains of wheat.

"What the devil?" Mr. Goodlowe snapped. "Has the electric power gone off again, Julius?"

"Yes, sir," said the colored man, his words, despite the native softness of his voice, having a peculiar intonation revealing that his mother tongue was not the English of the South. "The current has been gone since six o'clock this afternoon, and the telephone has been out of order for some time, as well."

"Dam' poor service!" muttered Goodlowe, but:

"How long's it been since your light and telephone died before?" sharply queried Captain Chenevert.

I saw the Negro shiver, as though he felt a sudden draft of gelid air. "Not since Madame Derringer——" he began, but the captain shut him off.

"That's what I thought," he answered; then, to de Grandin, in a whisper:

"Something dam' funny about this, sir. Their electric light all died the night Mrs. Derringer was—er—died, and the telephone went dead at the same time. Same thing happened on both previous occasions, too. D'ye mind if I pop over to the barracks and put in a trouble call? I've got my motorcycle parked out in the yard."

De Grandin had been studying the butler with that intent, unwinking stare of his, but now turned to the trooper with a nod. "By all means," he replied. "Go there, and go quickly, my friend. Also return as quickly as may be with one of your patrol cars, if you please. Park it at the entrance of the grounds, and approach on foot. It may be we shall be in need of help, and I would have it that our reinforcements come unannounced, if possible."

"O. K.," the other answered, and turned upon his heel.

"How's Miss Nancy, Julius?" Mr. Goodlowe asked. "Feeling any better?"

"No, sir, I'm afraid she's not," the butler replied, and again it seemed to me that he shivered like a man uncomfortable with cold, or in mortal terror.

Jules de Grandin's gaze had scarcely left the Negro since he saw him first. Now, abruptly, he addressed him in a sudden flow of queer, outlandish words, vaguely reminiscent of French, but differing from it in tone and inflection, no less than in pronunciation, as the argot of the slums differs from the language of polite society.

The Negro started violently as de Grandin spoke to him, glanced shamefacedly at the plate of wheat he held, then, keeping his eyes averted, answered in the same outlandish tongue. Throughout the dialogue was constantly repeated a queer, harsh-sounding word: *"laogaroo,"* though what it meant I had no faintest notion. At length:

"Bon," de Grandin told the butler; then, to Mr. Goodlowe and me: "He says that *Mademoiselle* your niece is feeling most unwell, *Monsieur,* and that he thinks it would be well if we prescribed for her. He and his wife have attempted to assist her, but she has fallen into a profound stupor from which they can not rouse her, and it was while attempting to summon a physician from Keyport that he discovered the telephone had gone out of order. Have we your permission to attend *Mademoiselle?"*

"Yes, of course," Mr. Goodlowe answered, and, as we followed the butler up the wide, balustraded stairway:

"Dam' West Indian niggers—I can't think why Clarke had 'em around. I'll be gettin' rid of 'em in short order, as soon as I can get some of our servants up here from the South. Why the devil couldn't he have told *me* about Nancy?"

"Perhaps because he had no opportunity," de Grandin answered with a mildness wholly strange to him. "I surmised that he came from Haiti or Martinique by his accent and by—no matter. Accordingly, I addressed him in his native *patois,* and he responded. I must apologize for breaking in upon your conversation, but there were certain things I wished to know, and deemed it best to ask him quickly, before he fully understood the nature of my mission here."

"Humph," responded Mr. Goodlowe. "Did you find out what you wanted?"

"Perfectly, *Monsieur.* Forgive me if I do not tell you what it is. At present I have no more than the vaguest of vague suspicions, and I should not care to make myself a laughing-stock by parading crazy theories unbacked by any facts."

Plainly, Mr. Goodlowe was unimpressed with Jules de Grandin as an investigator, and it was equally plain that he had in mind setting forth his dissatisfaction in no uncertain terms, but our advent at his niece's bedroom door cut off all further conversation.

"MISS NANCY—oh, Miss Nancy!" the butler called in a soft, affectionate tone, striking lightly on the panels with his knuckles.

No answer was forthcoming, and, waiting a moment, the old Negro opened the door and held his candle high, standing aside to permit us to pass.

In the faint, yellow light of half a dozen candles flickering in wall-sconces we descried a girl lying still as death upon the tufted mattress of a high, four-poster bed. Her eyes were closed, her hands were folded lightly on her breast, and on her skin was the ghastly, whitish-yellow pallor of the moribund or newly dead. Small gouts of perspiration lay like tiny beads of limpid oil upon her forehead; a little ridge of glistening globules of moisture had formed upon her upper lip.

"My God, she's dead!" cried Mr. Goodlowe, but:

"Not dead, but sleeping—though not naturally," de Grandin answered. "See, her breast is moving, though her respirations are most faint. Attend her, Friend Trowbridge."

Placing his finger-tip against her left radial artery, he consulted the dial of the diminutive gold watch strapped against the under side of his left wrist, motioning me to take her right-hand pulse.

"Great heavens!" I exclaimed as I felt the feeble throbbing in her wrist. "Why, her heart's beating a hundred and twenty, and——"

"I make it a hundred and twenty-six," he interrupted. "What diagnosis would you make from the other signs, my friend?"

"Well," I considered, lifting the girl's eyelids and holding a candle to her face, "we have pallor of the body surface, subnormal temperature, rapid pulse and weak respiration, together with dilated pupils—acute coma induced by anemia of the brain, I'd say."

"Consequent on cardiac insufficiency?" he added.

"That's my guess."

"Perfectly. Mine also," he agreed.

"A little brandy ought to help," I hazarded, but:

"Undoubtlessly," he acquiesced, "but we shall not administer it.

"Monsieur," he turned to Mr. Goodlowe, "will you be good enough to leave us? We must take measures for *Mademoiselle's* recovery, and"—he raised his brows and shoulders in a shrug—"it would be better if you left us with the patient."

Obediently, our host turned from the room, and as the door swung to upon him:

"Dépêchez, mon vieux!" de Grandin told the butler, who, at his signaled order, had remained in the room. "Cords, if you please; make haste!"

Lengths of linen were snatched down from the windows, quickly twisted into bandages, then bound about the girl's wrists and ankles, finally knotted to the uprights of the bed. Last of all, several bands were passed completely around her body and the bed, binding her as fast upon the mattress as ever criminal was lashed upon the rack.

"Whatever are you doing?" I asked him angrily as he knotted a final cincture. "This is positively inhuman, man."

"I fear it is," he admitted; then, turning to the butler:

"Summon your wife to stand guard, *mon brave,* and bid her call us instantly if *Mademoiselle* awakes and struggles to be free. You understand?"

"Parfaitement, M'sieu," returned the other.

"What the deuce does it mean?" I demanded as we descended the stairs. "First you interrogate that servant in some outlandish gibberish; then you lash that poor, sick girl to her bed, as though she were a violent maniac—that's the

damnedest treatment for anemic coma I ever saw! Now——"

"*Cordieu,* my friend, unless I am much more mistaken than I think, that is the damnedest anemic coma that I ever saw, as well!" he broke in. "Anon I shall explain, but—ah, here is the good Monsieur Goodlowe; there are things which he can tell us, too." We entered the library where Mr. Goodlowe paced furiously before the fireless fireplace, a long cigar, unlighted, in his mouth.

"There you are!" he barked as we entered the room. "How's Nancy?"

De Grandin shook his head despondently. "She is not so good, *Monsieur,*" he answered sadly. "We have done what we could for her at present, and the butler's wife sits watching by her bed; meanwhile, we should like to ask you several things, if you will kindly answer."

"Well?" Goodlowe challenged.

"How comes it that *Monsieur* your brother had servants from the French West Indies in his service, rather than Negroes from his native state?"

"I don't see that has any bearing on the case," our host objected, "but if you're bound to have the family pedigree——"

"Oh, yes, that would be most helpful," de Grandin assured him with a smile.

THE other eyed him narrowly, seeking to determine whether he spoke ironically, and at length:

"Like most Kentuckians, our family came from Virginia," he returned. "Greene Clarke, our maternal great-grandfather, was a ship-owner in Norfolk, trading principally with the West Indies—it was easier to import sugar from Saint Domingue, as they called it then, than to bring it through the Gulf from Louisiana; so he did a thriving trade with the islands. Eventually, he acquired considerable land holdings in Haiti, and put a younger brother in charge as overseer. The place was overrun and burned when the Blacks revolted, but our great-granduncle escaped and later, when Christophe set up stable government, the family re-acquired the lands and farmed them until the Civil War. The Virginia branch of the family always kept up interest in the West Indian trade, and Clarke, in his younger days, spent considerable time in both Haiti and Martinique. It was on one of his sojourns in Port au Prince that he acquired Julius and Marie as household servants. They came with him to the States and were in his service more than forty years. They'll not be here much longer, though. I don't like West Indian niggers' impudent ways, and I'm going to give 'em the boot as soon as I can get a couple of our servants up here."

De Grandin nodded thoughtfully; then:

"You have no record of your ancestor's activities in Haiti before the Blacks' revolt?" he asked.

"No," Mr. Goodlowe answered shortly.

"Ah? A pity, *Monsieur.* Perhaps we might find in that some explanation of the so strange deaths which seem to curse this house. However—but let it pass for the present; we must seek our explanation elsewhere, it would seem."

He busied himself lighting a cigarette, then turned once more to Mr. Goodlowe. "Captain Chenevert should be here shortly," he announced. "It might be well if you accompany him when he leaves, *Monsieur.* Unless I misread the signs, the malign genius which presides over this most unfortunate house is ready for another manifestation, and you are in all probability the intended victim. We may foil it and learn something which will enable us to thwart it permanently in

your absence; if you remain—*eh bien,* who can say what may occur?"

Mr. Goodlowe eyed him coldly. "You're suggesting that I run away?" he asked.

"Ah, no; by no means, *Monsieur,* merely that you make a temporary retreat while Friend Trowbridge and I fight a rear-guard engagement. You can not help us by your presence. Indeed, your being here may prove a great embarrassment."

"I'm sorry, sir," our host returned, "but I can't agree to any such arrangement. I've called you in to solve this case at Captain Chenevert's suggestion, and against my own best judgment. If I'm to pay you, I must at least demand that you put me in possession of all facts you know—or think you know. Thus far your methods have been more those of the fortune-telling charlatan than the detective, and I must say I'm not impressed with them. Either you will handle the case under my direction, or I will write you a check for services to date and call another into consultation."

De Grandin's little, round blue eyes flashed ominously, with a light like winter ice reflecting January moonlight. His thin lips drew away from his small, white teeth in a smile which held no mirth, but he controlled his fiery temper by an almost superhuman effort. "This case intrigues one, Monsieur Goodlowe," he answered stiffly. "It is not on your account that I hesitate to leave it; but rather out of love for mastering a mystery. Be so good as to listen attentively, if you please:

"To begin, when first I saw your butler I thought I recognized in him the earmarks of the Haitien. Also, I noted that he bore a saucer filled with wheat when he responded to our knock. Now, in Haiti, as I know from personal experience, the natives have a superstition that when an unclean spirit comes to haunt a place, protection can be had if they will scatter grains of rice or wheat before the door. The visitant must pause to count the scattered grain, they think, and accordingly daylight will surprize him before the tale is told. The *Quashee,* or Haitien blacks, refer indifferently to various unpleasant members of the spirit world as *'loogaroo,'* which is, of course, a corruption of *loup-garou,* or werewolf.

"Very well. I drew my bow at random and addressed your man in Haitien *patois,* and instantly he answered me. He told me much, for one who hears himself addressed in the language of his childhood in a strange land will throw away reserve and give full vent to his emotions. He told me, by example, that he was in the act of scattering grain about the house, and especially upon the stairs and in the passage leading to Mademoiselle Nancy's room, because he was convinced that the *loogaroo* which had already made 'way with three members of your family was planning a fresh outrage. For why? Because, by blue, on each occasion previously the electric light inside the house had died for no apparent reason, and all outside connections by telephone had similarly died. Captain Chenevert, who had made investigation of the deaths, noted this coincidence, also, and remarked upon it. He is now gone to report the failure of your light and telephone to the proper parties.

"But something else, of even greater interest, your butler disclosed. The day before her father's death, the day Monsieur Derringer died so strangely, and immediately preceding Madame Derringer's so tragic death, Mademoiselle Nancy exhibited just such signs of illness as she showed today—dullness, listlessness, headache; finally a heavy stupor almost simulating death, from which no one

could rouse her. Never before—and he has known her all her life—had she shown signs of such an illness. Indeed, she was always a most healthy young lady, not subject to the customary feminine ills of headache, biliousness or stomach-sickness. *Alors,* he was of opinion that these sinking-fits of hers were connected in some manner with the advent of the *loogaroo.*

"I must admit I think he reasoned wisely. When Doctor Trowbridge and I examined her, your niece showed every sign of anemic coma; this in a lady who has always been most healthy, is deserving of remark; especially since she shows no evidence of cardiac deficiency intervening these strange seizures. You comprehend?"

"I comprehend you've let yourself be fooled by the bestial superstitions of an ignorant savage!" Mr. Goodlowe burst out disgustedly. "If this is a sample of the way you solve your cases, sir, I think we'd better call it quits and——"

"M'sieu, M'sieu l' Médecin, dépêchez-vous—Ma'mselle est——" the urgent whisper cut him short as an elderly Negress, deeply wrinkled but still possessing the fine figure and graceful carriage of the West Indian black, appeared at the library door.

"We come—at once, immediately, right away!' de Grandin answered, turning unceremoniously from Mr. Goodlowe and hastening up the stairs.

"Detain him without, my friend," he whispered with a nod toward Goodlowe as we reached the sickroom door. "Should he find her bound, he may ask questions, even become violent, and I shall be too busy to stop my work and slay him."

Accordingly, I blocked the bedroom door as best I could while the little Frenchman and the Negress hastened to the bed.

NANCY GOODLOWE was stirring, but not conscious. Rather, her movements were the writhings of delirium, and, like a patient in delirium, she seemed endowed with supernatural strength; for the strong bandages which bound her wrists had been thrown off, and the surcingle of cotton which held her to the bed was burst asunder.

"Morbleu, what in Satan's name is this——" began de Grandin, then, abruptly:

"But, *gloire de Dieu,* what is *that?"*

He brushed past the bed, leant out the window and pointed toward the patch of smooth-shaven lawn before the loggia red-brick-and-iron summer-house. What seemed to be a jet of vapor rising from a broken steam-pipe was whirling like a dust-swirl above the grass plot, rotating still more swiftly; at length concrescing and solidifying. An optical illusion it doubtless was, but I could have sworn the gyrating haze took form and substance as I gazed and became, beneath my very eyes, the image of *a great white snake.*

"Here, damn you, what d'ye mean by this?" Mr. Goodlowe burst past me into the girl's bedroom and snatched furiously at the cotton bindings which half restrained his niece upon the bed. "By gad, sir, I'll teach you to treat gentlewomen this way!" he stormed; then, surprizingly:

"Ah?"

Raising furious eyes to de Grandin as the little Frenchman peered out the window, he had caught sight of the ghastly, whirling wreath of vapor on the lawn.

The thing by now had definitely assumed a serpent's form. And it was a moving serpent; a serpent which circumvoluted in a giant ring, rearing and swaying its ugly, wedge-shaped head from side to side; a serpent which made

loops and figure-eights upon the moonlit lawn, and described great, flowing triangles which melted into squares and hexagons and undulating, coiling mounds, an ever-changing, never-hastening, never-resting figure of activity.

"Ah?" Mr. Goodlowe repeated, horror and blank incredulity in the querying monosyllable.

We saw his face. The eyes were staring, glassy, void of all expression as the eyes of one new-dead; his jaw hung down and his mouth was open, round and expressionless as the entrance to a small, empty cave. His breath sounded stertorously, like a snore. For a moment he stood thus; then, hands held before him like a sleep-walker, or a person playing blind man's buff, he turned, shambled down the hall and began a slow and halting descent of the stairs.

"Loogaroo—loogaroo—Ayida Ouedo!" gibbered the Negro servant, her horror-glazed eyes rolling in a very œstrus of fear as she gazed alternately at the whirling thing upon the lawn, the struggling girl upon the bed, and Jules de Grandin.

"Silence!" cried the Frenchman; then, clearing the space between the window and the bed at a single leap: "Mademoiselle Nancy, awake!" he ordered, seizing the girl's shoulders and shaking her furiously from side to side as a terrier might shake a rat.

For a moment they struggled thus, seemingly engaged in a wrestling bout, but finally the girl's dark eyes opened and she looked him in the face.

De Grandin's little, round blue eyes seemed starting from his head, the veins along his temple swelled and throbbed as he leant abruptly forward till his nose and that of Nancy Goodlowe nearly touched. "Attend me—carefully!" he commanded in a voice which sounded like a hiss. "You will go back to sleep, a simple, restful, natural sleep, and both your waking and subconscious minds shall be at rest. You will awake when daylight comes, and not before. I, Jules de Grandin, order it. You comprehend? Sleep—sleep—*sleep!*" he finished in a low and crooning voice, swaying the girl's shoulders to and fro, as one might rock a restless child.

Slowly she sank back on her pillow, composed herself as quietly as a tired little girl might do, and in a moment seemed to fall asleep, all traces of the delirium which had held her in its grip a moment since departed.

"Oh!" Involuntarily the exclamation broke from me. The writhing, twisting serpent on the lawn had vanished, and I could not rightly say whether what remained was a wraith of whirling vapor or a spot of bright moonlight which seemed to move as the shadow of some wind-blown bough swept over it.

"Come, my friend," de Grandin ordered sharply, snatching at my elbow as he dashed from the room. "We must find him."

Mr. Goodlowe had left the house and crossed the intervening lawn by the time we reached the door. As we came up with him he stood a few feet from the place where we had seen the great white snake, staring about him with puzzled, wide, lack-luster eyes.

"Wha—what am I doing here?" he faltered as the Frenchman caught him by the shoulder and administered a gentle shake.

"Do not you remember, *Monsieur?*" de Grandin asked. "Do you not recall the thing you saw out here—the thing which beckoned you to come, and whose summons you obeyed?"

Goodlowe looked vaguely from one of us to the other. "I—I seem to have some

recollection of some one—something—which called me out," he answered in a sleepy, faltering voice, "but who it was or what it was I can't remember."

"No?" de Grandin returned curiously. "*Eh bien,* perhaps it is as well, or better. You are tired, *Monsieur.* I think you would do better if you slept, as we should, also. Tomorrow we shall talk about this case at length."

Docile as a sleepy child, our fiery-tempered host permitted us to lead him to the house and assist him into bed.

De Grandin made a final tour of inspection, noted the light, natural sleep in which Nancy Goodlowe lay, then followed Julius to the room assigned us. Clad in lavender pajamas, mauve dressing-gown and purple kid slippers, he sat beside the window, gazing moodily out upon the moonlit lawn, lighting one vile-smelling French cigarette from the glowing stump of another, muttering unintelligibly to himself from time to time, like one who makes a mental calculation of a puzzling problem in arithmetic.

"For goodness' sake, aren't you ever coming to bed?" I asked crossly. "I'm sleepy, and——"

"Then go to sleep, by all means," he shot back sharply. "Sleep, animal; rest yourself in swinish ease. Me, I am a sentient human being; I have thoughts to think and plans to make. When I have done, then I shall rest. Until that time you will oblige me by not obtruding yourself upon my meditations."

"Oh, all right," I answered, turning on my side and taking him at his word.

GORDON GOODLOWE was in a chastened mood next morning. While he had no clear recollections of the previous evening's events, there was a haunting fear at the back of his mind, a sort of nameless terror which dogged his footsteps, yet evaded his memory as fancied images half seen from the tail of the eye dissolve into nothingness when we turn about and seek to see them by direct glance.

Miss Goodlowe remained in bed, apparently suffering from no specific illness, but in a greatly weakened state. "I think she'll be all right, with rest and a restricted diet," I ventured as de Grandin and I left her room, but:

"*Non,* my friend, you have wrong," the little Frenchman told me with a vigorous shake of his head. "Tonight, unless I much mistake my diagnosis, she will have another seizure, and——"

"You'll hypnotize her again?" I interjected.

"By blue, not by any means!" he broke in. "Me, this evening I shall be a spectator at the show, though not, perhaps, an idle one. No, on second thought I am decided I shall be quite active. Yes, certainly."

When Captain Chenevert arrived with assurances that "trouble-shooters" of the electric and telephone companies could find no mechanical reason for the failure of service in the Goodlowe house, and when, by trial, we found both electric light and telephone in perfect working order, de Grandin showed no surprize. Rather, he seemed to take the mystery of alternating failure and function in the service as confirmation of some theory he had formed.

Shortly after noon, accompanied by Julius, the butler, he made a hurried trip in Captain Chenevert's police car, returning before dinner time with a covered tin pail filled with something which splashed as he bore it to the kitchen and put it near the stove, where it would remain warm, but not become really hot.

I passed a rather dismal day. Mr. Goodlowe was in such a state of nervous

fear that he seemed incapable of carrying on a conversation; Miss Goodlowe lay quietly in bed, refusing food, and answering questions with a gentle patience which reminded me of a convalescent child; de Grandin bustled about importantly, now in conference with Captain Chenevert, now with Julius, now delving into some old family records which he found in the library. By dinner time I was in a state where I would have welcomed a game of cribbage as a pastime.

Our host excused himself shortly after dinner, and the young police captain, de Grandin and I were left alone with cigars and liqueurs on the terrace. "You're sure you've got some dope on it?" Chenevert asked suddenly, flinging his cigar away with nervous petulance, then selecting another from the humidor and lighting it with quick, spasmodic puffs.

"None but the feeble-minded are sure, of that I am indubitably sure," de Grandin answered, "but I think I have at least sufficient evidence to support an hypothesis.

"This house, I found by inquiries which I made in the city, was largely built of second-hand materials; the owner wished that weathered bricks be used, and considerable search was necessary to procure materials of a proper age and quality. The brick and iron work of which that little summer-house is built, by example, came from a demolished structure on the outskirts of Newark, a house once used to restrain the criminally insane. You apprehend the significance of that?"

THE young trooper regarded him quizzically a moment, as though seeking to determine whether he were serious. At length: "No, I can't say I do," he confessed.

De Grandin turned interrogatively to me. "Do you, by any happy chance, see a connection in it?" he demanded.

"No," I answered. "I can't see it makes any difference whether the brick and iron came from an insane asylum or a chicken-coop."

He nodded, a trifle sadly. "One should have anticipated some such answer from you," he replied. Then: "Attend me, carefully, both of you," he ordered. "We must begin with the premise that, though it is incapable of being seen or weighed or measured, a thought is a thing, no less than is a pound of butter, a flitch of bacon or a dozen sacerdotal candles. You follow me? *Bien. Bien,* whether you do or not.

"A madhouse is far from being a pleasant place. There human wreckage—the mentally dead whose bodies unfortunately survive them—is brought to be disposed of, imprisoned, cabined, cribbed, confined. Often, those we call 'criminally insane' are very criminal, indeed, though not medically insane. Their madness consists in their having given themselves, body, soul and spirit, to abysmal and unutterable evilness. Very well. From such there emanates—we do not know quite how, though psychical experiment has proved it to be a fact—an active, potent force of evil, and inanimate things, like stone and wood, brick and iron, are capable of absorbing it. Oh, yes.

"I have seen spirit-manifestations evoked from a chip taken from a rafter in a house where great wickedness had been indulged in; I have seen dreams of old, dead, evil days evoked in sensitive subjects doing no more than sleep in the room where some bit of torture-paraphernalia from the prisons of the Spanish Inquisition in Toledo had been placed all unbeknown to them. Yes. There, then, is our starting-point.

"What then? Last night three people saw a most remarkable manifestation on that lawn yonder. I saw it; the Negro butler's wife beheld it; even Doctor Trowbridge, who most certainly can not be called a psychic, saw it. *Voilà;* that thing was no figment of the fancy, it was there. Of course. Whether Monsieur Goodlowe saw it, in the same sense that we beheld it, we can not say. He has no recollection of it. But certainly he saw something—something which caused him to leave his house and walk across the grass plot exactly as did his brother, his kinsman and his female relative, presumably. Had I not been quick, I think we should have seen another tragedy, there, before our very eyes."

"I say," I interrupted, "just what was it you did last night, de Grandin? I have to admit, however much my better judgment tells me it was an optical illusion, that I saw—or thought I saw—a great snake materialize on the lawn; then, when you hypnotized Miss Goodlowe, the thing seemed to fade away. Did she have any connection with——"

"Ah bah," he broke in with a nod. "Has the lens any connection with the burning of the concentrated sunlight? By damn-it, I think yes!"

"How——" I began, but:

"You have seen the working of the *verre ardent*—the how do you call him? —burning-glass? Yes?"

"Of course," Chenevert and I replied in chorus.

"Very good." He nodded solemnly. "Very, exceedingly good. All about us, invisible, impalpable, but all about us, none the less, are spiritual forces, some good, some evil, all emanations of generations of men who have lived and struggled, loved, hated and died long years agone. But this great force is, in the main, so widespread, so lacking in cohesion, that it can not manifest itself physically, except upon the rarest of occasions. At times it can make itself faintly felt, as sunshine can impart a coat of tan to the skin, but to inflict a quick and powerful burn the sunlight must be bound together in a single intense beam by the aid of the burning-lens. Just so with these spiritual forces, whether they be good or naughty. They are here already, as sunlight is abundant on a sunny day, but it needs the services of a medium to bring these forces into focus so they can become physically apparent. Yes; assuredly.

"Now, not all mediums reside in the stuffy back rooms of darkened houses, eking out precarious livelihoods by the contributions of the credulous who desire to consult the spirits of departed relatives. *Hélas,* no. There are many unconscious mediums who all innocently give force and potency to some evil spirit-entity which but for them would be unable to manifest itself at all. Such mediums are most often neurotic young women. They seem ideally fitted to supply the psychoplasm needed by the spirit for materialization, whether that manifestation be for the harmless purpose of ringing a tambourine, tooting a toy trumpet or—committing bloody murder.

"This, of course, I knew already. Also, I knew that on previous occasions when members of the Goodlowe family had been so tragically killed, Mademoiselle Nancy had suffered from strange seizures such as that she had last night. 'It are a wicked thing—a spirit or an elemental—draining the physical energy from her in the form of psychoplasm with which to make itself material,' I tell me. Accordingly, when I see that serpent forming out of nothingness, I turn at once to Mademoiselle Nancy as its source of power.

"She is unconscious, but her subcon-

scious mind is active; she seeks to burst the bonds I put upon her, to what end? One wonders. But one thing I can do if only I can succeed in making her conscious for one little so small minute. I can hypnotize her—put her in a natural sleep in which the unconscious giving off of physio-psychical power will be halted. And so I wake her, though I have great trouble doing it. I wake her and then I bid her sleep once more. She sleeps, and the building up of that so evil white snake-thing comes abruptly to a halt. *Voilà. Très bien.*"

"What's next?" Chenevert demanded.

"First, a further test of that which summoned Monsieur Goodlowe from the house last night," the little Frenchman answered. "I have taken means which will, I think, insure its harmlessness; but I am curious to see how it goes about its work. That done, we shall destroy the summer-house from which the evil emanation seems to come, and that accomplished, we shall seek for causes of these so strange deaths and for the source of the curse which seems to overhang this family. Logicians reason *a posteriori;* we shall seek to visualize in the same manner, from ultimate effect to primal cause. You understand?"

Captain Chenevert shook his head, but held his peace.

"I'm hanged if I do," I declared.

"Very well, you shall, in time," he promised with a smile, "but you shall not be hanged. You are too good a friend to lose by hanging, dear old silly Trowbridge of my heart."

IT MUST have been near midnight when the Negro butler ran out on the terrace to summon us. "*Ma'mselle* is restless, *M'sieu l' Médecin,*" he announced. "My wife is with her, but——"

"Very good," de Grandin cried. "Is all in readiness?"

"*Oui, M'sieu.*"

"*Bon.* Let us go." He hastened toward the house, and:

"Look upon the lawn, my friends," he bade Chenevert and me. "What is it that you see, if anything?"

We turned toward the plot of grass before the summer-house, and I felt a prickling of my scalp and, despite midsummer heat, a sudden chill ran down my neck and back. A jet of whitish vapor was rising from the grass, and as we looked, it began to weave and wind and twist, simulating the contortions of a rearing serpent.

"Good God!" cried Captain Chenevert, reaching for his pistol, but:

"Desist!" de Grandin warned. "I have that ready which will prove more efficacious than your shot, *mon capitaine,* and I do not wish that you should make unnecessary noise. It is better that we do our work in silence. Await me here, but on no account go near it!"

In a moment he and Julius returned, each armed with what looked like those large tin atomizers used to spray insecticide on rose bushes.

They charged across the strip of lawn, their tin weapons held before them as soldiers might hold automatic rifles, deployed while still some distance from the whirling mist, then turned and faced each other, de Grandin running in a circle from left to right, the Negro circling toward him from right to left. Each aimed his atomizer at the earth and we heard the *swish-swish* of the things as they worked the plungers furiously. Although I could not tell what the "guns" held, it seemed to me they sprayed some dark-hued liquid on the grass.

"*Fini!*" the little Frenchman cried as he and Julius completed their circuit. "Now—*ha? Ah-ha-ha?*" He seemed to

freeze and stiffen in his tracks as he looked toward the house.

Chenevert and I turned, too, and I heard the captain give a muffled exclamation, even as I caught my breath in surprize. Walking with an undulating, swaying motion which was almost like that of a dance, came Nancy Goodlowe. Her flimsy nightdress fluttered lightly in the faint night breeze. In the moonlight, falling fine as dusted silver powder through the windbreak of Lombardy poplars, she was so wraith-like and ephemeral as to seem a phantom of the imagination. Her arms were raised before her, and bent sharply at the elbows, and again at the wrists, so that her hands thrust forward, for all the world like twin snake-heads, poised to strike. Abruptly she came to a halt, half turned toward the house from which she had come, as though awaiting the advent of a delayed companion, then, apparently reassured, began describing a wide circle on the lawn in a gliding, side-stepping dance. I saw her face distinctly as a moonbeam flashed upon it, a tense drawn face, devoid of all expression as a countenance carved of wood, eyes wide, staring and expressionless, mouth retracted so that a hard, white line of teeth showed behind the soft red line of lips.

And now the drawn, sardonically smiling lips were moving, and a soft contralto chant rose upon the midnight stillness. The words I could not understand. Vaguely, they reminded me of French; yet they were not truly French, resembling that language only as the jargon of a Yorkshireman or the *patois* of our canebrake Negroes simulated the English of an educated Londoner. One word, or phrase, alone I understood: *"Ayida Oueddo—Ayida Oueddo!"* intermixed with connectives of unintelligible gibberish which meant nothing to me.

"Quick, my friends, seize him, lay hands on him, hold him where he is!" de Grandin's whispered order cut through Nancy Goodlowe's chanting invocation, as he motioned us to turn around.

As we swung round we beheld Gordon Goodlowe. Like a wanderer in a dream he came, the night air stirring through his tousled hair, his eyes fast-set and staring with a look of blank, half-conscious horror. His mouth was partly opened, and from the corners there drooled two little streams of spittle. He was like a paralytic moving numbly in a state of quarter-consciousness, a condemned man marching to the gallows in an anesthesia of dread, volition gone from out his limbs and muscles working only through some reflex process entirely divorced from conscious guidance.

"Do not address him, only hold him fast!" de Grandin ordered sharply. "On no account permit him to overstep the line we drew; the other may not come to him; see you that he goes not to it!"

Obediently, Chenevert and I seized Goodlowe by the elbows and stopped him in his stride. He did not struggle with us, nor, indeed, did he seem aware we held him, but we could feel the deadweight of his body as he leaned toward the twisting, writhing thing inside the circle which de Grandin and Black Julius had marked upon the lawn.

The mist had now solidified. It had become a great, white snake which turned and slid its folds like melting quicksilver, one upon another, rearing up its dreadful head, opening its fang-barbed mouth and hissing with a low, continuous sibilation like the sound of steam escaping from a broken pipe.

I SHRANK away as the awful thing drew itself into a knot and drove its scale-armored head forward in a sudden lunge

toward us, but terror gave way to astonishment as I saw the driving battering-ram of scale and muscle stopped in mid-air, as though it had collided with an invisible, but impenetrable, barrier. Time and again the monster struck at us, hissing with a sort of venomous fury as each drive fell futilely against the unseen wall which seemed to stand between ourselves and it. Then——

From the little red-brick summer-house there came a sudden spurt of flame. Unseen by us, de Grandin and the butler had drenched the place with gasoline until the very bricks reeked with it. Now, as they poured a fresh supply of petrol out, they set a match to it, and the orange flames leaped upward hungrily.

A startling change came over the imprisoned reptile. No longer did it seek to strike at Chenevert and Goodlowe and me; rather, its efforts seemed directed to regaining the protection of the blazing summer-house. But the invisible barrier which had held it back from us restrained its efforts to retreat. It struck and struck again, helplessly, at the empty air, then began to twist and writhe in a new fashion, contorting on itself, swaying its head, shuddering its coils, as though in unsupportable agony. And as the lapping tongues of flame leaped higher, the thing began to shrink and shrivel, as though the fire which burnt the roof and cracked the bricks and bent the iron grilles of the little house with its fierce heat, were consuming it.

It was a fearsome sight. To see a twenty-foot snake burned alive—consumed to crisping ashes—would have been enough to horrify us almost past endurance, but to see that mighty, writhing mass of bone and scale and iron-hard muscle cremated by a fire which blazed a half a hundred feet away—so far away that we could scarcely feel the least faint breath of heat—that was adding stark impossibility to nauseating horror.

"Fini—triomphe—achevé—parfait!" de Grandin cried triumphantly as he and Julius capered round the blazing summer-house like savages dancing round some sacrificial bonfire. "You were strong and cunning, *Monsieur le Revenant,* but Jules de Grandin, he was stronger and more cunning. *Ha,* but he tricked you cleverly, that one; he made a mock of all your wicked, vengeful plans; he caught you in a trap where you thought no trap was; he snared you in a snare from which there was no exit; he burned you in the fire and made you into nothing—he has consumed you utterly and finally!" Abruptly he ceased his frenzied dance and insane chant of triumph, and:

"See to *Mademoiselle, mon brave,*" he ordered Julius. "I think that she will rest the clock around when your wife has put her in her bed. Tomorrow we shall see the last act of this tragedy and then—*eh bien,* the curtain always falls upon the finished play, *n'est-ce-pas?*"

CANDLES burned with a soft, faintly shifting light in the tall seven-cupped candelabrum which graced the center of the polished mahogany table in the Goodlowe drawing-room. Full to repletion at the end of an exceptionally good dinner, Jules de Grandin was at once affable and talkative. "What was it you and Julius sprayed on the lawn last night?" I had asked as Gordon Goodlowe, his niece, Captain Chenevert and I found seats in the parlor and Julius, quiet-footed as a cat, brought in coffee and liqueurs before setting the candles alight and drawing the gold-mesh curtains at the tall French windows.

The little Frenchman's small blue eyes twinkled roguishly as he turned his gaze

on me and brushed a wholly imaginary fleck of dust from the sleeve of his immaculate white-linen mess-jacket. "Chicken blood," he answered with an elfin grin.

"What?" Chenevert and I demanded in incredulous chorus.

"Précisément, your hearing is quite altogether perfect, my friends!" he answered. "Chicken blood—*sang des poulets,* you comprehend?"

"But——" I began, when he checked me with an upraised hand.

"Did you ever stop to think why there are statues of the blesséd saints upon the altars of the Catholic church?" he asked.

"Why there are—what the deuce are you driving at?" I demanded.

He drained his cup of brandied coffee almost at a gulp, and patted the needle-sharp ends of his diminutive wheat-blond mustache with affectionate concern. "The old schoolmen knew nothing of what we call 'the new psychology' today," he answered with a chuckle, "but they had as good a working knowledge of it as any of our present-day professors. Consider: In the laboratory we employ rotating mirrors to induce a state of quick hypnosis when we would make experiments; before that we were wont to use gazing-crystals, for very long ago it was found that the person concentrating his attention on a small, bright object was an excellent candidate for hypnotism. Very good, but that is not all. If one stares fixedly at anything, whatever be its size, he soon detects a feeling of detachment stealing over him—I have seen soldiers standing at attention become unconscious and fall fainting to the ground because they focused their gaze upon some object before them, and held it there too long.

"Very well, then. The olden fathers of the Church discovered, not by psychological formulæ, but empirically, that an image placed upon a shrine gave the kneeling worshipper something on which to concentrate his gaze and induced a state of mild semi-hypnosis which made it possible to exclude extrinsic thoughts. It enabled the worshipper, in fine, to coordinate his thought with the wording of his prayer—made the act of praying less like indulging in a conversation with himself. You apprehend? Good. The underlying psychology of the thing the fathers did not know, but they proved by successful experiment that the images fulfilled this important office.

"Similarly: In darkest Africa, where the Voodoo rites of the West Indies had their birth, worshippers of the unclean gods typified by the snake discovered that the blood of fowls, especially chickens, was a potent talisman against their deities, which might otherwise burst the boundaries of control. Every Voodoo rite, whatever its nature, is accompanied by the sacrifice of a fowl, preferably a rooster, and this blood is scattered in a circle *between the worshippers and the altar of their gods.* Why this is we do not know; we only know it is. But upon some ancient day, so long ago that no one knows its date, it was undoubtlessly discovered that the serpent-god of the Voodoo men could be controlled by spreading warm chicken blood across his path. This was a secret which the Haitien Blacks brought with them out of Africa.

"Very good. When Mademoiselle Nancy struggled on her bed the night we came, and we beheld something taking shape upon the lawn, something with a serpent's form, which drew Monsieur Goodlowe from the house by some subtle fascination, what was it that Julius' wife cried out? *'Ayida Oueddo!'*

"Now that, my friends, is the designation of the wife and consort of *Dam-*

ballah Oueddo, the great serpent-god of the Voodoo men. She is a sort of Juno in their pantheon, second in power only to her dreadful husband, who in turn, of course, is their Jove.

"*Alors,* her involuntary cry gave me to think. I felt my way, step by careful step, like a blind man tap-tapping with his stick down some unfamiliar street. If that which we saw materialize on the lawn were indeed the form of *Ayida Oueddo,* then the charms used by the Haitien Voodoo men should prove effective here. It is the logic, *n'est-ce-pas?*

"Accordingly, I procured a plentiful supply of chickens' blood from one who deals in poultry, and had it ready for emergency last night. The 'reason why' I can not tell you; I only know that I applied such knowledge as I had to conditions as I found them. I took the chance; I gambled and I won. *Voilà tout.*"

"But why'd you burn the summer-house?" Chenevert demanded.

"*Pardieu,* we 'sterilized' it," de Grandin answered. "When we had burned it we put an end to those so evil hauntings which had caused three deaths and nearly caused a fourth. Fire kills all things, my friends: microbes, animals, even wicked spirit manifestations. Tear down a haunted house, and the earth, all soaked in evil emanations of the long-dead wicked, will still give forth its exhalations in the form of what we call 'ghosts' because we lack a better name for them. More: incorporate one little portion of that haunted place in some new building, and the new structure may prove similarly haunted. But if you burn the place—*pouf!* The hauntings and the haunters cease, and cease for ever. The wood or brick or iron of which the haunted house was made acts as a base of operations for the spirit manifestation, but when it is destroyed by fire, or even superheated, it becomes 'cleansed' in the sense the exorcists use the term, and no longer can it harbor old, unclean and sinful things."

Gordon Goodlowe, no longer skeptical, but frankly interested, put in: "Can you account for the apparition which undoubtedly caused these deaths and almost killed me, Doctor?"

De Grandin pursed his lips as he regarded the glowing end of his cigar intently. "Not altogether," he replied. "Vaguely, as the wearer of a too-tight shoe feels the approach of a storm of rain, I have a feeling that your family's connection with the former French possession of Haiti is involved, but why it should be I do not know.

"However"—he bowed ceremoniously to Nancy Goodlowe—"*Mademoiselle* your niece has it in her power, I believe, to enlighten us."

"I?" the girl asked incredulously.

"*Précisément, Mademoiselle.* Remember how in each former case you were stricken with a so strange illness, then the serpent-thing appeared. I do not know, of course, but I much suspect that the illnesses were caused by the slow withdrawal of the psycho-physical force which we call psychoplasm in order that it might be absorbed by the evil entity which could not otherwise attain physical force and kill your father and your kinsmen. Therefore, it would seem, you have some—all innocent, I assure you—connection with this so queer business. If that be so, you may remember something which will help us."

"Remember?" the girl burst out. "Why, I've absolutely no recollection of anything. I only know that I've been ill, then lapsed into unconsciousness, and when I woke——"

"Memory is of many kinds, *Made-*

moiselle," de Grandin broke in gently. "There are certain ancestral experiences which, though we may have no conscious knowledge of them, are graven deeply on the records of our subconscious memory. Consider: Have you never, in your travels, come upon some old, historic place, and had a sudden feeling of 'Why, I've been here *before*'? Consciously, and in this life, you have not, of course; yet you are greatly puzzled by the so strange familiarity of a scene which you are sure you have never seen before. Yes, of course. The explanation is presumed that some ancestor of yours underwent a deep emotional experience at that place. Incidents historically ancestral have made a deep impression on the *family memory*, and when proper stimuli are applied, this group memory will work its way up to the surface, as objects long immersed in water and forgotten will rise to the top if the pond is sufficiently agitated. You comprehend?"

"I—I don't think I do," she answered with a puzzled smile. "Do you mean that something which made a marked impression on my great-great-grandmother, for instance, and of which I'd never heard, might be 'remembered' by me if I were taken to the place where it occurred, or——"

"Precisely, exactly; quite so!" he cut in enthusiastically. "You have it, *Mademoiselle*. In each of us there is some vestige of the past; we are the sum of generations long since dead, even as we are the remote ancestors of generations yet unborn. I do not say that we can do it, but with your consent and assistance, I think it possible that we may probe the past tonight, and learn whence came this curse which has so sorely tried your family. Are you willing?"

"Why, yes, of course, if Uncle Gordon says so."

"You won't hurt her in any way?" asked Mr. Goodlowe.

"Not in the slightest, *Monsieur;* upon my honor. Be very sure of that."

"All right, then, I'll agree," our host returned.

NANCY GOODLOWE seated herself in a big wing chair, hands folded demurely in her lap, head lolling back against the tapestry upholstery. Theretofore I had regarded her as a patient more than a woman—two very different things!—and the realization of her really splendid beauty, her smoldering dark eyes, her strong, white teeth, her alluring bosom and captivating turn of long, lithe limb, struck me suddenly as she lay back in her chair with just enough voluptuousness of attitude to make us realize that she knew she was a woman in a group of men, and as such the center of attraction which was not entirely scientific.

De Grandin took his stand before her, thrust his hand into the left-hand pocket of his cummerbund and drew forth the little gold note-pencil which hung upon the chain to the other end of which was fixed his clinical thermometer. *"Mademoiselle,"* he ordered softly, "you will be good enough to look at this—at its very tip, if you please. So? Good. Observe it closely."

Deliberately, as one who beats time to a slow andante tune, he wove the little, gleaming pencil back and forth, describing arabesques and intricate, interlacing figures in the air. Nancy Goodlowe watched him languidly from under long, black eyelashes. Gradually, her attention fixed. We saw her eyes follow every motion of the pencil, finally converge toward each other until it seemed she made some sort of grotesque grimace; then the lids were lowered on her purple eyes, and her head, propped against the

chair-back, moved slightly sidewise as the neck muscles relaxed. Her folded hands fell loosely open on her silk-clad knees, and she was, to all appearances, sleeping peacefully. Presently the regular, light heaving of her bosom and the softly sibilated, even breathing, told us she had, indeed, fallen asleep.

The little Frenchman put his pencil in his pocket, crossed the room on tiptoe and stroked her forehead and temples with a quick, light touch. *"Mademoiselle,"* he whispered, "can you hear me?"

"I can hear you," answered Nancy Goodlowe in a soft and drowsy voice.

"Bien, ma belle; you will please project your mental eye upon the screen of memory. Go back, *Mademoiselle,* until you reach the time when first your family crossed the trail of *Ayida Oueddo,* and tell us what it is you see. You hear?"

"I hear."

"You will obey?"

"I will try."

For something like five minutes we sat there, our eyes intent upon the sleeping girl. She rested easily in the big chair, her lips a little parted, her light, even breathing so faint that we could scarcely hear it, but no sign or token did she give that she had seen a thing of which she might tell.

"Ask her if——" Gordon Goodlowe began, but:

"S-s-s-st!" de Grandin cut him short. "Be quiet, stupid one, she is—*grand Dieu,* observe!"

As though the room had suddenly become chilled, *Nancy Goodlowe's breath was visible.* Like the steaming vapor seen upon a freezing winter day, a light, halitous cloud, faintly white, tangible as exhaled smoke from a cigarette, was issuing from between the young girl's parted lips.

I felt a sudden shiver coursing down my spine, one of those causeless fits of nervous cold which, occurring independently of outside stimuli, make us say "some one is walking over my grave." Then, definitely, the room grew colder. The humid, midsummer heat gave way to a chilliness which seemed to affect the soul as well as the body; a dull, biting hardness of cold suggestive of the limitless freezing eternities of interstellar space. I heard de Grandin's small, strong teeth click together like a pair of castanets, but his gaze remained intently on the sleeping girl and the gray-white mist which floated from her mouth. "Psychoplasm!" I heard him mutter, half believingly.

The smoke-like cloud hung suspended in the dead-still atmosphere of the room a moment; then gently, as though wafted by a breeze, it eddied slowly toward the farther wall, hung motionless again, and gradually spread out, like the smoke-screen laid by a military airplane, a drifting, gently billowing, but thoroughly opaque curtain, obscuring the wall from ceiling to baseboard.

It is difficult to describe what happened next. Slowly, in the gray-white wreaths of vapor there seemed to generate little points of bluish light, mere tiny specks of phosphorescence scintillant in the still smoke-screen. Gradually, but with ever-quickening tempo, they thickened and multiplied till they floated like a maze of dancing midges, spinning their luminant dance until they seemed to coalesce into little nebulæ of light as large as glowing cigarette-ends, but burning all the while with an intense, blue, eery light. It was as if, in place of the smoke-vapor, the room was cut in twain by a curtain of solid, opaque moonlight.

Gradually the glowing nebulæ changed from their spinning movement to a slow, weaving motion. The luminous curtain

was breaking up, forming a definite pattern of highlights and shadows; a picture, as when the acid etches deeply in the copper of a half-tone plate, was taking form before our eyes—we were looking, as through the proscenium of a theater, into another room.

It was a beautiful apartment, regal in its lavishness as though it formed some portion of a royal palace. Walls were spread with Flemish tapestries, chairs and couches were of carven walnut and dull-red mahogany, rare specimens of faience stood on gilt-legged, marble-topped tables. A massive clock, with dial of beaten silver and hands of hammered gold, swung its jeweled pendulum in a case of polished ebony.

Against a chaste white-marble mantelpiece there leaned a woman in a golden gown. She was a charming creature, scarce larger than a child, with small, delicate features of cameo clarity, soft, wavy hair cut rather short and clustering round her neck and ears in a multitude of tiny ringlets. Her eyes were large and dark, her lips full and red; her teeth, as she smiled sadly, were small and white as bits of shell-pearl. There was, too, a peculiar quality to her skin, not dark with sunburn, nor yet with the olive-darkness of the Spaniard or Italian, but rather golden-pink, in perfect complement to the golden tissue of her high-waisted, sleeveless gown. I looked at her in wonder for a moment; then——

"A quadroon!" I classified her, the product of a mixture of two races, a lovely mixed-caste offspring of miscegenation, more beautiful than ninety of each hundred whites, inheriting only the perfection of form and carriage of black ancestors from the Congo.

A door at the farther end of the apartment opened quickly, but soundlessly, and a young man hastened forward. He was in military dress, the uniform of a French officer of a hundred and fifty years ago, but the shoulders of his scarlet-faced white coat were decorated with knots of yarn instead of the more customary epaulets. He paused before the girl, booted heels together, and bowed stiffly from the waist above the pale-gold hand she gave him with the charming, precise grace I had so often seen in Jules de Grandin. As he raised her fingers to his lips I saw that like hers, his skin was pale mat gold, and in his dark-brown, wavy hair there was the evidence of African descent.

His lips moved swiftly, but no sound came from them, nor did we hear what she replied. With a start I realized we were witnessing a pantomime, a picture charged with action and swift motion, but silent as the cinematograph before the "movies" became vocal.

What they said we could not tell, but that the young man bore some tidings of importance was evident; that he urged the girl to some course was equally apparent, and that she refused, although with great reluctance and distress, was obvious.

The entrance of the room was darkened momentarily as a third actor strode upon the scene. Clothed in white linen, booted and spurred, a heavy riding-whip in his hand, he fairly swaggered through the choicely furnished room. No quadroon this, no slightest hint of Africa was in his straight, dark hair or sunburned features; this was a member of the dominant, inevitably conquering white race, and, by his features, an American or Englishman. As he drew near the girl and the young officer I realized with a start of quick surprize that the latest comer might have been Gordon Goodlowe at thirty, or perhaps at thirty-five.

He looked with mingled anger and

contempt upon the other two a moment, then shot a quick, imperious question at the woman. The girl made answer, wringing her slim hands in a very ecstasy of pleading, but the man turned from her and again addressed the youthful soldier. What answer he received I could not tell, but that it angered him was certain, for without a second's warning he raised his riding-whip and cut the youth across the face with its plaited thong. Blow after blow he rained upon the unresisting boy, and finally, flinging away the scourge, he resorted to his fists, felled the trembling lad to the floor and kicked him as he might have kicked a dog.

I stared in horror at the exhibition of brutality, but even as I looked the picture was obscured, the moving figures faded in a blur of smoky haze, and once again we found ourselves staring at a wall of idly drifting vapor.

AGAIN the little sparkling lights began to dance within the smoke, and now they spun and wove until another scene took form before us. It was a bedroom into which we looked. A tall, four-poster bedstead stood in the foreground, while bureaus and dressing-tables of carved apple-wood were in the corners. Light curtains of some cotton stuff swayed gently at the windows, and across the darkened chamber a shaft of moonlight cut a swath as clear and bright as a spotlight on a darkened stage.

Beside a toilet table stood the girl we'd seen before, more beautiful and winsome in her nightdress of sheer cambric than she had been when clothed in cloth-of-gold. Sadly she regarded her reflection in the oval, gold-framed mirror as she drew a comb of tortoise-shell through her curling, jet-black ringlets; then, as she saw another image in the glass, she straightened in an attitude of panic fear.

Across her creamy shoulders leered the face of the white man who had thrashed the soldier in the scene we had seen before, and now the shadow gave way to the substance as the man himself half walked, half staggered into the room. That he was drunk was evident; that he had drunk until the latent beast was raised in him was also patent as he lurched across the room unsteadily, grasped the trembling girl in his arms and crushed her to him, bruising her protesting lips with kisses which betrayed no trace of love, but were afire with blazing passion.

The girl's slim form bent like a taut bow in his grasp, as she struggled futilely to break away; then, as her groping hands fluttered across the dressing-table's marble top, we saw her slender fingers close upon a slim, thin-bladed dagger. The fine steel, no thicker than a knitting-needle, gleamed in the ray of moonlight as it flashed in an arc, then fleshed itself in the man's back an inch or so beneath the shoulder-blade.

He let her go and fell back with a grimace of mingled rage and pain, a serio-comic expression of surprize spreading on his liquor-flushed and sunburned features. Then, like a pouncing beast of prey, he leaped on her.

As a terrier might shake a rat or a savage tom-cat maul a luckless mouse, he shook her, swaying her slim shoulders till her head bobbed giddily and her short hair waved flag-like back and forth. Protesting helplessly, she opened her mouth, and the force with which he shook her drove her teeth together on her tongue so that blood gushed from her mouth in a bright spate. Now, not content with shaking, he beat her with his doubled fists, striking her to the floor in a little, huddled heap, then raising her again so that he might once more knock her down.

The brutal beating lasted till I would have put my hand before my eyes to shut the cruel sight out, but quickly as it started it was done. A soundless cry came from the girl's tormenter, and he raised his hand across his shoulder, attempting to assuage the flow of blood; then, half turning as he grasped at empty air, he fell face-forward to the floor. We saw a wide, red stain upon the linen of his shirt as he lay there twitching with convulsive spasms.

The white-gauze curtain at the chamber window fluttered with a sudden movement not caused by the midnight breeze, and a slim, brown hand was thrust across the sill. Between the parted folds of curtain we caught a glimpse of a scarred countenance, the lash-marked face of the young soldier whom we had seen the white man beat. For a moment the face was silhouetted against the background of the night; then the slim hand opened, letting fall some object at the trembling girl's bare feet. It was the dried wing of a tropic vampire-bat.

ONCE more the scene dissolved in haze, and once again it formed, and now we looked upon a tableau of midnight jungle. Resinous torches, some thrust into the earth, some fastened to the trunks of palm-trees, cast a glow of ruddy light upon the scene. A cloud of heavy smoke ascended from the torches, forming an inky canopy which blotted out the stars. Seated on the ground in a great circle was a vast concourse of Blacks, men and women in macabre silhouette against the flickering torchlight, some beating wildly on small, double-headed drums, others circling in and out in the mazes of a shuffling, grotesque dance. Lewd, lecherous, lascivious, the postures of the dancers melted quickly from one to another, each more instinct with lechery than the one preceding. Some semi-naked, some nude as at the instant of their birth, they danced, and we knew that something devilish was toward, for though we could not catch the tempo of the drums, we felt the tension of the atmosphere.

Now the drummers ceased to hammer on their tom-toms; now the dancers ceased to pose and shuffle in the blood-red glare of torchlight; now the crowd gave back, and through the aisle of panting, crowding bronze-black bodies strode a figure. Her head was bound about with scarlet cloth, and a wisp of silk of the same color was wrapped about her loins, leaving the remainder of her body starkly naked, save for a heavy coating of white pigment. Straight from her shoulders, to right and left, she held her arms, and in each hand was clutched by the feet a cock, one white, the other black. With slow, gliding steps she paced on white-smeared, slim bare feet between the lines of crouching figures who watched her avidly in hot-eyed, slabbering passion.

Before a low and box-shaped altar she came to pause, her arms straight out before her. Her head bent low as an aged, wrinkle-bitten Negress leaped from the shadows and waved a gleaming butcher-knife twice in the lambent torchlight, decapitating a cockerel at each sweep of the steel. The fowls' heads dropped to earth and the painted priestess lifted high the sacrifices, their wings fluttering, their cut necks spurting blood. Slowly she began to wheel and turn beneath the gory shower, then faster, faster, faster, until it seemed that she was spinning like a top. We saw her face a moment as, all dewed with blood, she turned it toward the altar. It was the girl whom we'd seen twice before.

And now the wrinkled crone who had slain the cocks leaped monkey-nimble to the box-like altar, snatched frenziedly at the strong lock and hasp which held the

cover down, and flung the lid back from the chest. All eyes, save those of the girl who still spun whirlingly before the sanctuary, were intent upon the box. I watched it, too, wondering what fresh obscenity could be disclosed. Then, with a gasping intake of my breath, I saw.

Slowly, very slowly, there reared from the box the head, the neck, an eight-foot length of body of a great white snake! *Ayida Oueddo,* the White Serpent Goddess, the deity of Voodoo rites! *Ayida Oueddo,* the Goddess of Slaughter—this girl was a vowed priestess of her bloody cult!

THE scene obscured once more, then slowly took new form. We stood within a crowded courtroom. Three judges, two in black, one in red, were seated on the dais; flanked by two gendarmes with muskets and fixed bayonets, the golden girl, now clothed in simple white, with a wide straw hat tied underneath her chin with satin ribbons, stood before the court, while the white man she had stabbed stood forward to accuse her.

We saw him hurl his accusation at her, we saw the spectators turn whispering to each other as the evidence was given; we saw her plead in her defense. At last we saw the center judge, the judge all gowned in red, address the girl, and saw her curtsey deeply as she made reply.

We saw the judges' heads, two capped with black, one crowned with red, bow together as they took counsel of each other; then, though we heard no words, we *saw* the sentence of the court as the red-robed center figure delivered judgment in two syllables:

"À mort."

Sentence of death was passed, and she took it smilingly, curtseying low as though to thank the judges for a courtesy bestowed.

WE LOOKED upon a public square, so hot beneath the tropic noonday sun that a constant flickering of heat-rays arose from off the kidney stones which formed the pavement. The square was lined with crowding men and women, rich townspeople, wealthy planters and their womenfolk, colored men of every shade from ebony to well-creamed coffee; a battalion of white *infanterie de ligne* in spotless uniforms, a company of mulatto *chasseurs* in their distinctive regalia. In the center, where the sun beat mercilessly, stood a scaffold with an X-shaped frame upon it.

The executioner, a burly, great-paunched brute whose sleeveless shirt disclosed gorilla muscles, was attended by two giant Negroes who looked as though they should have been head-butchers in an abattoir.

A rolling, long tattoo of drums was sounded by the troops' field music as they led her from a house which faced the square, a nun upon her left, a black-frocked priest in shovel hat upon her right, head bowed, lips moving in a ceaseless, mumbled prayer. A youthful *sous-lieutenant,* his boyish mouth hard-set with loathing at the job he had to do, marched before; a squad of sweating gendarmes closed the file.

She was dressed in spotless linen, a straight and simple frock of the fashion which one sees in portraits of Empress Josephine, a wide straw hat bedecked with pink-silk roses and tied coquettishly with wide pink ribbons knotted underneath her chin. Satin shoes laced with narrow ribbons of black velvet round the ankles were upon her little feet, and she held a satin sunshade in her hand.

There was something of *opera bouffe* about it all, this gay parade of wealth and fashion and flashing military uniforms

called out to witness one slim girl walk unconcernedly across the public square.

But the thread of comedy snapped quickly as she reached the scaffold's foot. Closing her frivolous parasol, she gave it to the nun, then turned her back upon the executioner while her golden-flecked brown eyes searched the crowd which waited breathless at the margin of the square. At last she found the object which she sought, a tall, broad-shouldered white man in the costume of a planter, who lolled at ease beneath a palm-tree's shade and watched the spectacle through half-closed eyes. Her hand went out, aiming like a pointed weapon, as she hurled a curse at him. We could not hear the words she spoke, but the slow articulation of the syllables enabled us to read her lips:

"As I am crushed this day, so shall you and yours be crushed by my *ouanga*."

Then they stripped the linen garment off her, tore off her hat and little satin shoes, her silken stockings and daintily embroidered lingerie. Stark, utterly birth-naked, they bound her to the planks which formed a six-foot X and broke her fragile bones with a great bar of iron. We could not hear the piteous cries of agony which came each time the executioner beat on her arms and legs with his heavy iron cudgel, we only saw the velvet, gold-hued flesh give way beneath the blows, the slim and sweetly molded limbs go limp and formless as the bones within them broke beneath the flailings of the bar. At last we saw the writhing, childish mouth contort to a scream of final agonized petition: *"Jésus!"* Then the lovely head fell forward between her outstretched arms, and we knew that it was over. Her sufferings were done, and the justice which demanded that the black or mixed-blood who raised hand against a white must die by torment was appeased. The scene once more dissolved in swirling, hazy clouds of mist.

The last scene was the shortest. A maddened mob of shouting, blood-drunk blacks swarmed over the great house where first we saw the girl; they smashed the priceless furniture, hacked and chopped the walls and woodwork in wild, insensate rage, finally set the place afire. And from every hilltop, every smiling valley, every fruitful farm and bountiful plantation, rose the flames of devastation and the cries of slaughtered women, men and children. The blacks were in rebellion. Oppression brought its own reward, and those who killed and maimed and tortured and arrogantly wrought the blood and sweat of others into gold were killed and maimed and tortured, hounded, harassed, hunted in their turn. The reign of France upon Saint Domingue was ended, and that century-long saturnalia of savagery, that amazing mixture of Congo jungle and Paris salon called the Republic of Haiti had begun.

The candlelight burned softly in Pierre's select speakeasy. The *omelette soufflé* (made with Peychaud bitters) had been washed down with a bottle of tart *vin blanc;* now, cigars aglow and liqueurs poured, we waited for de Grandin to begin.

"*Tiens,* but it is simplicity's own self," he informed us. "Does not the whole thing leap all quickly to the eye? But certainly. Your remote kinsman, Monsieur Goodlowe, the one you told us first established family holdings in the Island of Saint Domingue, which now we know as Haiti, undoubtlessly found life wearisome in the tropics. Women of his race were rare—they were mostly married or ugly, or both, and, besides, white women pine away and fail beneath the tropic sun. Not

so with the mixed-breeds, however. They, with tropic sunshine in their veins, flourish like the native vegetation in equatorial lands. Accordingly, *Monsieur l'Ancêtre* did as many others did, and took a quarter-blooded beauty for his wife—without benefit of clergy or of wedding ring. Yes, it has been done before and since, my friends.

"Now, consider the condition on that island at that time: There were 40,000 whites, of all classes, 24,000 mulattoes and lesser mixed-bloods, whom the law declared to be free citizens, and over half a million barbarous black slaves. A very devil of a place. The free mulattoes were the greatest problem. Technically free as any Frenchman, they yet were scorned and hated by their white co-citizens, many of whom shared paternal ancestors with them. The *affranchis*—free mulattoes—were imposed upon in every way. They sat apart in church and at the theater; they were forbidden to wear certain cloths and colors decreed by fashion; their very regiments of soldiers wore a distinctive uniform. Moreover, they were made the butt of hatred in the courts. A white man killing a mulatto might be sentenced to the galleys, or be made to pay a fine. In a very flagrant case, he might even suffer the inconvenience of being put to death, but even then his comfort was infringed upon as little as was possible. He was hanged or shot. At any rate, he died with expedition, and without unnecessary delay. The mulatto who so far forgot himself as to kill or even to attempt the life of a white, was prejudged before he entered court, and inevitably perished miserably upon the torture frame, his bones smashed to splinters by the executioner's iron bar. But no; it was not very pleasant to be a mulatto in Saint Domingue those days.

"Very well, let us start from there. When I beheld those West Indian Negroes in your service, and heard their talk of *loogaroos*, and when I learned an ancestor of yours had settled in Haiti in the olden days, I determined that the whole thing smelled of Voodoo. You know how Julius and I outwitted that white ghost-snake which had killed your relatives; you know my theory of its appearance on your lawn. Very good; we knew *how* it came there; the *why* was something else. But certainly.

"Mademoiselle Nancy was inextricably mixed up in the case. The evil genius resident in the fiber of the haunted summer-house drew strength and power to work material evil to your family from her. Therefore, having rendered the haunting demon powerless, I decided to have Mademoiselle Nancy act as our spirit-guide and open for us the door to yesterday.

"*Bien.* Accordingly, I asked her to 'remember.' There are many kinds of memory, my friends. Oh, yes. We remember, by example, what happened yesterday, or last year, or when we were very young. Ah-ha, but we remember other things, as well, although we do not know it. Take, for example, the common dream of falling through the air. That is a 'memory,' though the dreamer may never have fallen from a height. Ha, but his remote ancestors who dwelt in trees, they fell, or were in peril of falling, daily. To fall in those days meant injury, and injury meant inability to fight with or escape from an enemy. Therefore, not to fall was the greatest care the race had on its mind. Generations of fearing falls, taking care not to fall, produced a mass memory of the unpleasant results of falling. But naturally. Accordingly, one of today remembers in his dreams the horror of falling from the tree-tops.

"Consider further: Though every one has dreamed he fell—and often wakened from such dreams with the sweat of terror on his brow—we never have this memory of falling while we are awake. Why so? Because our waking, conscious, modern personality knows no such danger. For that matter, we never have the sense of fleeing from a savage animal while we wake, but when we sleep—*grand Diable,* how often, in a nightmare, do we seek to flee some monstrous beast, and suffer horrors at our inability to run. Another racial memory—that of our remote cave-dwelling ancestors caught fast in a morass while some saber-toothed tiger or cave-bear hunted them for dinner! The answer, then, is that when we resign our waking, workaday consciousness to sleep we open the sealed doors to yesterday and all the different personalities the sum of which we are rise up to plague us. We suffer hunger, thirst or shipwreck which our ancestors survived, though we, as individuals never knew these things at all.

"*Bien tout.* These naughty dreams come to us unannounced. We can not call them up, we can not bid them stay away. But what if we are put to sleep hypnotically, then bidden to remember some specific incident in our long chain of ancestral memory? May not the subconscious mind walk straight to the cabinet in which that memory is filed and bring it to the light?

"That is the question which I asked myself when I considered sending Mademoiselle Nancy back along the trail of memory. It was only an experiment; but it was successful, as you saw.

"Mademoiselle Nancy is a psychic. Like the best of the professional mediums, she possesses that rare substance called psychoplasm in great abundance. Once she was *en rapport* with the olden days she did more than tell us of them, she showed them to us.

"Very well. This young lady of mixed blood whom your ancestor had taken for his light o' love, Monsieur Goodlowe, was also a member of the inner circle of the Voodooists. She was a *mamaloi,* or priestess of the serpent-goddess *Ayida Oueddo,* the consort of the great snake-god *Damballah.*

"Voodoo was a species of Freemasonry from which the whites were barred; many mulattoes and even people with smaller degrees of African blood were active in it. When first we saw her, she was talking with a young mulatto soldier. He had evidently come to summon her to attend a meeting of the Voodooists, and she was unwilling. Perhaps she felt such savage orgies were beneath her; possibly she had put them behind her as a sincere Christian. In any event, she was unwilling to obey the summons and fulfil her duty as a priestess. Then came her master, who was also your ancestor.

"You saw how he abused the messenger of Voodoo. Like all the whites, he hated the dark mysteries of the Voodooists—probably his hatred was akin to that which normal men feel for the snake; one part hate, three parts fear. Most white men thus regarded the secret cult which was, at the end, to knit the slaves and free mulattoes into a single force and sweep the white men from the island.

"Perhaps all would have been well, had not your ancestor become intoxicated that night. But drunk he got, and in his drunken fury he abused her.

"She stabbed him in the back, and perhaps, as much to spite him as for any other reason, determined to act as priestess at the altar of *Ayida Oueddo.* But whatever her decision was, the matter was taken from her hands when the mes-

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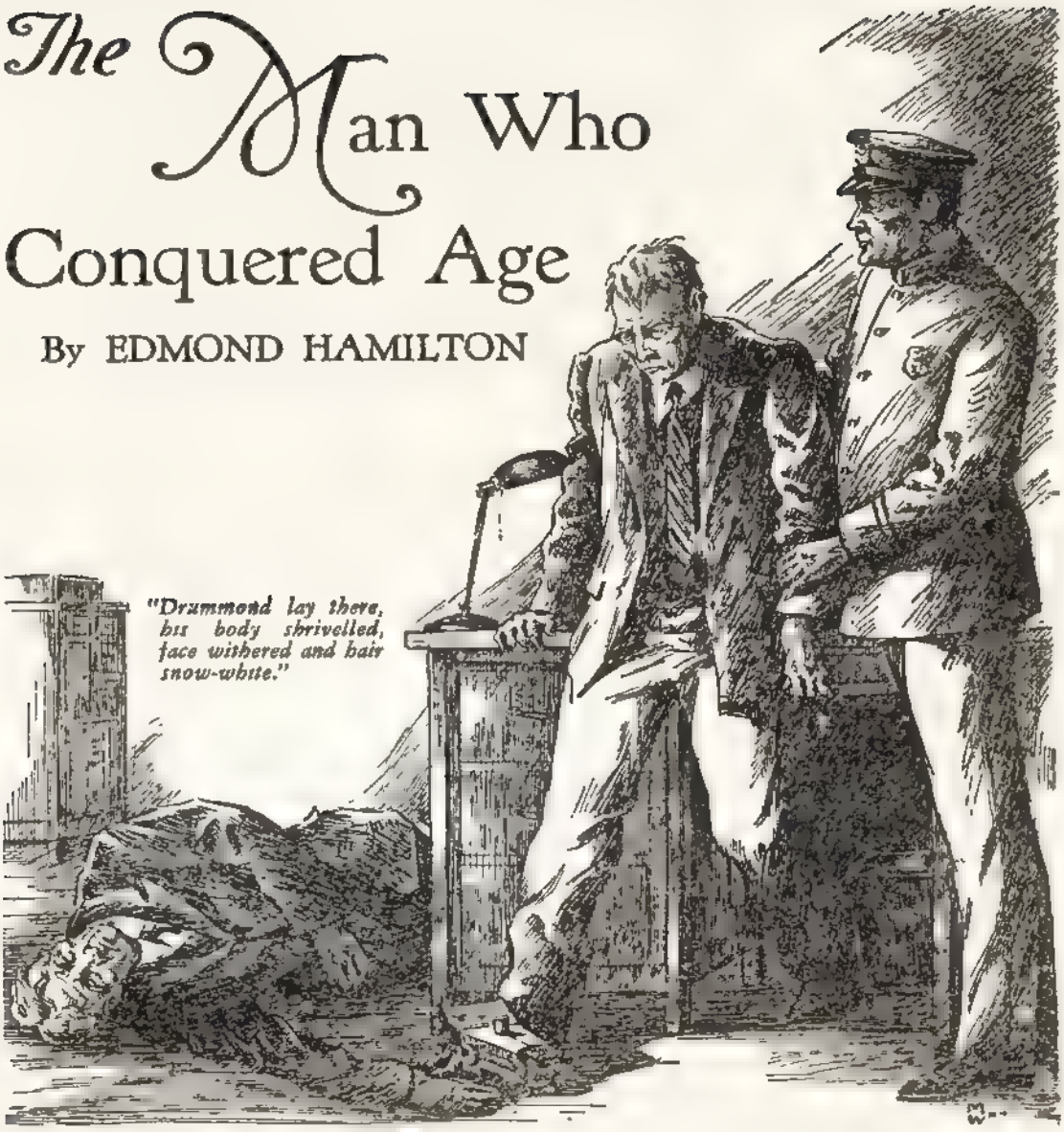
The Man Who Conquered Age

By EDMOND HAMILTON



"Drummond lay there, his body shrivelled, face withered and hair snow-white."

A gripping weird-scientific tale—a great scientist, drunk with power, runs amuck in the streets of New York

DOCTOR JOHN HALLECK walked a little tiredly up the steps of the narrow stone house and touched the bell-push. As he waited in the bright early-morning sunlight for answer, he found himself wishing that Professor Wilse Drummond lived nearer than this northwestern corner of New York City's island. Doctor Halleck was sixty; his scholarly face lined and his hair gray, and the early ride up here to Meckman Street had tired him.

He rang again, impatiently. Why had old Drummond been so insistent that he come up at once, if he were not here to receive him? But as Doctor Halleck asked himself that, the door opened.

A young man of twenty or twenty-one, with black hair and eyes and keen, somewhat ruthless features, stood in the door-

way. Doctor Halleck could not remember having seen him before, yet there was something bafflingly familiar about him.

"Professor Drummond's here?" Halleck asked, and the other nodded.

"Please come back into the laboratory," he said.

Doctor Halleck followed him through the house into the neat laboratory with its tiled walls and tangle of metal and glass bio-physical apparatus. "Will you tell Professor Drummond that Halleck's here?" he said to the young stranger.

The young man made an astonishing statement. "I am Professor Drummond," he said.

Doctor Halleck stared at him. "I mean Professor Wilse Drummond, the bio-physicist."

"And that is just who I am," the other calmly assured him.

"You're crazy!" Halleck exclaimed. "I know Drummond well—why, he's older than I am, seventy-one or seventy-two years of age."

The young man laughed in sheer amusement. "Nevertheless I am he," he said. "And I called you, Doctor Halleck, less than an hour ago asking you to come up here."

Doctor Halleck faced the other with dignity. "Whoever you are," he said, "I demand to see Professor Drummond at once. If this is some kind of practical joke on his part——"

The young man came closer, brought his face near. "Look, doctor," he said. "Do I look like Professor Drummond?"

Doctor Halleck stared into the youthful face. The keen features, the black eyes—now that baffling familiarity explained itself. "You do look like Drummond!" he said. "You're one of his grand-nephews?"

The young man shook his head. "No, I'm Drummond himself, the Professor Drummond you've known twenty years, who was on the faculty of Manhattan University with you until a few years ago."

Doctor Halleck was rapidly coming to feel as though some quality of insanity had injected itself into the situation.

"If you are Drummond," he said caustically, "how comes it that you look fifty years younger than when I last saw you?"

"It comes because I *am* fifty years younger," calmly replied the young man who called himself Professor Drummond. "Because, but a few hours ago, I made myself that much younger!"

"You made yourself that much younger?" echoed Doctor Halleck astoundedly. "Why, you must be mad!"

The other grasped his wrist, his black eyes snapping. "What is mad about it? As a scientist, as a biologist, do you find it so incredible that the age-processes of the human body can be controlled?"

"As a scientist?" Doctor Halleck clutched at the shred of explanation. "Do you mean to say that you've found some scientific way to——"

"I've found what men have dreamed of finding for centuries, yes!" said the young man exultantly. "The secret of controlling the age-process! I used it on my own senile body, and though I'm still Wilse Drummond, with his mind and mental power still, I've got the body I had when I was twenty! I've conquered age!"

"Good heavens, you do look as Wilse Drummond must have looked at twenty!" exclaimed the startled Doctor Halleck. "But the thing's impossible——"

"There's nothing impossible about it!" lashed the self-styled Wilse Drummond. "As a biologist you should be better able to appreciate its possibility than most men.

"Why shouldn't the processes of age

be controlled? What ages a human or animal body, anyway? The slowing down of its rate of metabolism, the rate of its capacity to absorb new energy from nutritive elements. As this rate of metabolism slows down, the body loses energy, weakens, ages.

"Suppose we can stimulate metabolism by outside forces? Then just as much as it is stimulated, so much more new energy can the body acquire, so much younger will it become. The disintegration of cell-structures due to lack of energy will be rebuilt and reversed, the body's cellular structures will be rebuilt to their youthful condition.

"Or, similarly, if we use forces that depress the rate of metabolism further instead of stimulating it, the body will grow older rapidly instead of younger. All we need, therefore, to make the body older or younger at will is to find the forces that can be turned upon it and cause that change in its metabolic rate."

Doctor Halleck, listening with an intentness against which he struggled, saw the eyes of this young man who called himself Wilse Drummond become set and hard.

"I DETERMINED five years ago to find those forces, that secret," he told Halleck. "Five years ago, when they kicked me out on a pension down there at Manhattan University because I was too old.

"Too old! Damn them, my mind was better than any of theirs, but because my body had become aged and feeble I was no good! I determined to show them, to show the world, that my mind was powerful enough to make my body young again. I would conquer this force of age that they thought had put me on the scrap-heap!

"And I did conquer it! I found, after more than four years of unceasing experimentation, a combination of high-frequency electrical radiations which stimulated the metabolism rate of animal bodies to an unheard-of degree. I turned those radiations on a rabbit dying of senility and almost instantly their effects brought that rabbit back into vigorous youth.

"I found, too, that a different combination of radiations had an opposite effect, slowed the metabolic rate almost to nothing. Those rays, turned on a young, healthy rabbit, so aged it before my eyes that this animal died of sheer senility at once. I needed only to construct compact and efficient projectors of these two forces, therefore, and I would have the power to make older or younger any living thing."

"And you mean to say that you did that?" Doctor Halleck said incredulously.

For answer the self-styled Drummond took from one of the laboratory's cabinets a black box-like object. It was an oblong black metal case like a large box-camera, Halleck saw, in one end a dull quartz lens several inches across with a regulating screw, and in the other end a three-way switch.

"This projector," the other told Halleck, "can send forth either force, the one that rejuvenates or the one that ages. It contains its own compact batteries, tubes and step-up coils, and the forces can be used close at hand or projected to some distance by altering the focus of the quartz lens.

"But a few hours ago I used the rejuvenating force upon myself, turning it off in a few moments when it had brought my body back to the physical youth it had when I was twenty, when it had taken me back to that age."

Doctor Halleck had listened with eyes

wide. "It sounds logical enough," he admitted. "But it's so unthinkable——"

"Unthinkable?" the other said. "Halleck, I'll dissipate your doubts once and for all."

He placed the black box-like projector on the table, its quartz lens directed into the room, then turned the switch on its back to the left.

A low buzzing sound, almost a hum, came from inside the projector, but there was no other manifestation. But the young self-styled Drummond now took his place a few yards in front of the projector's lens.

"Watch, Halleck," he said, "if you don't believe that projector can make a human body younger."

Doctor Halleck watched and in a moment a choking sound came from him. The young man standing under the projector's invisible forces was swiftly growing even younger. His body was becoming slimmer inside his clothing, his face rounder and rosier. The shoulders narrowed, the features lost their maturity—almost before Halleck could believe his eyes the stalwart young man of twenty had become a smooth-faced stripling of sixteen!

This boy who moments before had been a man stepped to the projector and turned it off. He turned to face the stunned Halleck.

"That was the rejuvenation force, Halleck," he said in a boyish treble voice matching his changed appearance. "I don't dare let it make me much younger than this, as the changes in interior structure would be too great for my adult-size body to stand.

"Now I'll show you the opposite force, the one that ages," he said, turning the projector's switch to the right and stepping back again into the range of the invisible radiations from its lens.

Doctor Halleck, incapable of speech, saw the stripling of sixteen changing again, growing older now under the invisible aging rays, developing rapidly again into the stalwart youth of twenty. And he was changing still more under the rays, growing still older!

His figure thickened into the solid one of a man of thirty-five, his face more lax and his hair sparser. Swiftly he continued to age and now was a man of fifty with graying hair and lined face.

Now he was sixty-five and now seventy, a thin, stooped figure with white hair and wrinkled face—the Professor Wilse Drummond whom Halleck knew! Drummond, yes, beyond doubt!

But Drummond was growing still older, his figure even more bent, hair thinner, eyes deep-sunken. A moment more and he tottered feebly to the table, snapped off the projector's buzzing force.

Halleck stared dumbly at this snow-haired senile figure who moments before had been a boy of sixteen.

"You see me now at an age over ninety," came Drummond's cracked voice. "If I went further in age I'd die right here of senility!"

His shrill laugh cackled. "But I'm not going further. I'm going back to youth."

Drummond turned the projector-switch again to the left, turning on the rejuvenating radiations, and as he stood in their force he went swiftly back in reverse order through his changes of the last moments.

Rapidly he grew younger into the elderly man of fifty, the muscular man of thirty, and at last again the vigorous young man of twenty. Then Drummond turned the projector's force off and turned to Halleck.

"WELL?" he said. "Does it seem so unthinkable now, Halleck?"

"It's terrible!" Halleck exclaimed.

"Good God, Drummond, why did you ever do it? You can't stay young like that!"

"Stay young?" Drummond echoed. "Of course I can! I can use the rejuvenation force to keep me at this age—twenty—indefinitely!"

"But you can't!" Doctor Halleck cried. "Why, it's unholy—the first law of life, as you should know from biology, is that all living things must age and in time die. Upset that law and you upset the world!"

"What if I do upset the world?" Drummond snapped. "Don't you see the power that this thing gives?"

"Power?" Halleck repeated. "It's a hellish power, Drummond! It will mean chaos for humanity to acquire this power. It will mean the end of natural death, all earth's peoples staying young indefinitely! Without natural death the world will soon be overcrowded with billions on increasing billions of people. Wars of crowding populations, famines, riots—that's what the power of staying young indefinitely will mean to humanity!"

Wilse Drummond shook his head. "You're wrong, Halleck. In the first place, I did not say I was going to give this power to humanity."

"You mean that you're going to give it up—destroy this thing?" asked Doctor Halleck with a ray of hope.

"Of course not," Drummond said. "But I'm going to sell it to those who can afford to buy. I'm going to sell indefinite youth to those who can pay for it, and they're going to pay high!"

Halleck stared at him in utter amazement, horror. "Sell youth? Why, Drummond, that would be worse than the other way! A world in which some men stayed young while others grew old and died would be worse than a crowded world where all stayed young! Think of the horror of it, of a world in which the rich few who were able to pay for youth lived on and on, while generation after generation of the many poor grew old and feeble and died!"

"What if they do age and die?" Drummond snapped. "They didn't care when I aged, did they? They kicked me out down at the university when I reached their age limit, didn't they? Precious little the world cared about me and precious little I care about the world! Whoever in the world wants to stay young or be made young again will have to pay my price. There won't be any bargaining, either, for they can't go to any one else. I've got a corner on rejuvenation and I'm going to squeeze humanity!"

Doctor Halleck clutched the other's arm desperately. "Drummond, you can't do it! Before I let you do it I'll smash your plans myself, let the world know what a horror you're planning!"

"You'll not!" Drummond exclaimed. "Halleck, don't be a fool! I called you up here because I'll need your help in this. I'm going to make you young like myself, and my associate in this thing. Why, think of the power it'll give us!"

"I don't want that kind of power and I don't want that kind of youth!" Halleck told him. "Drummond, will you give this thing up here and now?"

"No!" said Drummond fiercely. "I'm going on as I said, and if you're not with me it will be the worse for you!"

"Then I'm going to act!" Halleck said. He seized the black projector from the table and turned to the laboratory-door.

Drummond leapt to him and grasped his arm. "You fool!" he snarled. "What are you trying to do?"

"I'm going to smash your plans and smash this projector!" exclaimed Halleck, flinging open the laboratory door.

"You're not!" Drummond cried, and spun Doctor Halleck around, grasping at the projector.

Halleck tried to tear loose the other's hold but found quickly that he was no match in strength with the youthful Wilse Drummond. They struggled for a moment by the door and then with a desperate effort Halleck thrust Drummond back from him.

Drummond, his face crimson with fury, came at Halleck again before he could get through the door. Halleck swung his arm—the arm that held the projector—instinctively, to ward off the other's rush. The projector's metal case struck the onrushing Drummond's head and knocked him back, momentarily stunned.

Doctor Halleck ran through the door, out of the house and into the sunlit street, panting and clutching the projector still.

He started up the street westward at a run. Suddenly a tingling force seemed to sweep through him and at the same time he was aware of an increasing tiredness, growing weariness and weakness.

With a sudden startled thought he turned around. On the doorstep of the house that he had just left stood Wilse Drummond's youthful figure. Drummond, his face deadly, held a black projector like that in Halleck's hand and had it trained upon Doctor Halleck!

For a moment Halleck was rooted to the sidewalk in astonishment; then as his feeling of weakness grew swiftly, he understood and emitted a shrill cry. Drummond had another projector and was trying to kill him by turning the aging force upon him!

Doctor Halleck stumbled hastily toward and around a street-corner a few yards ahead. Out of sight of Drummond and out of the ray's range the tingling force no longer flooded him, but he still felt very weak and weary. Drummond was not now in sight behind him, though, and he hastened westward toward the busier thoroughfare of Riverside Drive, holding the projector tightly to him.

When he reached the drive it was apparent to Doctor Halleck that Drummond was not following him. Halleck stood, panting for breath. He caught sight of himself in a shop-window mirror and gazed in amazement at his reflection.

It was not his own elderly but straight and scholarly figure that looked back from the mirror at Halleck but a man twenty or twenty-five years older, a thin, bent, aged figure with snow-white hair and deep-wrinkled face and blinking eyes. Drummond's ray had aged him that much before he had escaped it!

Passers-by looked curiously at the hatless, senile figure with the camera-like box, staring at his own reflection. Halleck turned from the mirror with mind awhirl. What was he to do? Act to halt Wilse Drummond's dread plans, yes. But how?

He saw a policeman, started toward him and then stopped. The officer would only stare at his story, Halleck knew. It was not a story for him but for police headquarters, if he could get any one there to believe it.

Captain Crater! Halleck remembered now the detective-captain who twice had called him in for scientific aid and information, Captain Daniel Crater. He was the man to see—and at once!

Halleck hailed a taxi and in moments was speeding downtown along the drive. He tried to collect his chaotic thoughts.

What would Wilse Drummond do?

He still had another projector—he must have made two, Halleck now knew. He could still carry out that unholy scheme of his of selling youth if he was not stopped.

Again Doctor Halleck was swept by that dread vision of what the world would be if Drummond carried out his plan. Frantic struggles for the money that could buy rejuvenation, a youthful aristocracy ruling an aging world——

The taxi drew up with a jerk before the gray pile of police headquarters. Halleck paid the driver, hastened inside. He knew the way to Captain Crater's office and at once had his name sent in to that officer.

Captain Crater, a keen-faced, gray-eyed man of middle age, looked up as Halleck came in with a smile of welcome that changed suddenly into a frown.

"I thought you told the girl it was Doctor John Halleck calling," he said.

Halleck stared, then as he glimpsed himself in a mirror, remembered. His changed appearance! The work of the aging ray! "It *is*—I am Halleck, Captain!" he said.

Crater's eyes narrowed. "What kind of a game is this? Do you think I don't know Doctor Halleck?"

Halleck made a frantic gesture. "Crater, for God's sake listen to me! I'm Doctor John Halleck who helped you on the Ferson and Willetti cases. I know I look twenty-five years older than he, but I'm he nevertheless and I can prove it!"

"I don't know what you're trying to do, but I do know that you're not Halleck," Crater said decisively. "Spill your stuff before I have you locked up as an impostor."

Doctor Halleck with trembling, shrivelled hands set the projector on Crater's desk, then turned its switch to the left and as the projector buzzed stepped back into range of the invisible radiations from its lens.

He watched his reflection in the mirror, and as he felt the unseen vibrations of the rejuvenating forces tingling through his body, he could see age dropping from him. He changed, his figure becoming less bent, his face less lined, his eyes clearer, and strength coming back to him. Then when he was again at his normal age of sixty, the scholarly, gray-haired Doctor Halleck he had been, he turned the projector off and faced Captain Crater.

Crater's face was deathly white, his eyes protruding. "Halleck!" he gasped. "And you grew younger there before my—good God, what kind of witchcraft is this?"

"Witchcraft of science," Doctor Halleck told him, shaken himself by the thing. "You saw what this projector can do. Well, there's another one like it and the man who has it is going to smash the world with it if he's not stopped."

Halleck talked rapidly, almost incoherently, for minutes. As he spoke, leaning tensely across the desk, he saw the stunned amazement in Captain Crater's eyes replaced by dawning comprehension.

Halleck told of his experience with Wilse Drummond, of Drummond's demonstration of his power and of Drummond's plan. He saw belief and then determination in Crater's eyes.

"Halleck, I believe you!" the detective-captain said swiftly. "God knows, the whole thing is fantastic, but I've *got* to believe after what I just saw with my own eyes!"

"You'll act, then?" Halleck asked quickly. "Crater, if you don't act it will be as I say—Wilse Drummond setting up a monopoly on rejuvenation, a world gone crazy!"

"We'll act, and now!" Crater said tersely. "There may be no law to get Drummond under, but this is no time

for legalities. We've got to get Drummond and get him quick!"

He snapped an order into a desk-phone. "Manly? Two men and a squad-car at once—we're going out!"

Three minutes later Doctor Halleck sat beside Captain Crater and Manly in the front seat of a touring-car that tore north through the morning traffic with screaming siren, young Manly driving. In the rear seat two policemen hunched forward against the rush of wind.

HALLECK held clutched against him the square case of the projector. They shot at increasing speed along the upper drive, then made a perilously swift turn eastward. As they turned into Meckman Street a few moments later Doctor Halleck pointed down it toward Wilse Drummond's house.

The car drew up before it with siren dying, its occupants spilling forth with Captain Crater at their head.

"Stay with the car, Manly," Crater directed. "Dorsey, get round to the back of the house! McNamara, come with Halleck and me!"

Crater and the policeman McNamara ran up the steps with Halleck close behind them, into the house. The two officers had their pistols in their hands.

They followed Halleck's pointing finger through the house into the laboratory at the rear. It was empty of Wilse Drummond and the other projector. Papers had been flung about as though in hasty search for notes.

Captain Crater and McNamara quickly rummaged the house with Doctor Halleck, Dorsey coming in from the rear. They found neither Drummond nor the projector.

"He's gone!" Halleck cried. "Crater, Drummond's got away with the projector!"

"Gone, eh?" Captain Crater's face was grim. "Then we'll get a net out for him at once—he's got to be found."

"Drummond free to use that hellish power!" Dread clutched at Halleck's heart as they went out. "Drummond free——"

They started down the steps, Crater and McNamara beside Halleck. Autos and pedestrians were stopping curiously in the street at sight of the police-car.

Suddenly McNamara emitted an exclamation, a curiously high-pitched one. They turned toward him and for the moment Crater and Halleck were frozen with horror.

Policeman McNamara, a husky middle-aged man of solid build when they had come out of the house, was suddenly, swiftly changing. His brown hair was graying, whitening, his body rapidly shrinking and shrivelling. A shrill cry he uttered, his age-wrinkled face distorted, then clutched at the air and fell.

"What's happened?" Crater cried. "He grew old before our eyes here——"

"Wilse Drummond!" yelled Doctor Halleck. "Drummond and the aging ray—look there!"

He pointed over McNamara's prone form to a taxi parked a little way up-street, its motor running. Its back window was partly open and from the opening peered the dull quartz lens of a black projector like that Halleck held. Behind it Halleck glimpsed Wilse Drummond's youthful, hate-filled face.

Drummond saw they had seen him and snapped a word to his driver. The taxi leapt up the street. Captain Crater uttered a cry and he and Halleck leapt into the police-car as Manly, at its wheel, released its clutch. They shot up-street after the fleeing cab!

They gained rapidly upon the taxi, whose driver was apparently unaware of

the pursuit. Drummond's face appeared at its rear window again and Crater leaned out from the speeding police-car with pistol in hand. They were within fifty feet of the taxi—then Doctor Halleck glimpsed Drummond turning the black projector's lens back upon them.

Tingling force flooded through Halleck, he felt again that sudden onset of weakness and weariness, and saw that Manly and Crater and he were swiftly aging!

Crater's hair already was gray, his face wrinkled! Halleck cried out and Manly, glancing at him and Crater, saw and understood, whirled the car sidewise to avoid Drummond's aging ray.

Manly, himself grown from youth to middle age by then, turned the car too sharply and it struck the curb, caromed off a lamp-post, and crashed to a halt.

THEY stumbled out of the wrecked car as Wilse Drummond's cab disappeared around the next corner. They looked dazedly at each other. All three had aged ten years, Doctor Halleck from his normal sixty to a thinner, weaker seventy, Captain Crater from alert middle age to definite elderliness, and Manly from clean-cut youth to early middle age.

"Drummond's projector—the age-force!" Halleck exclaimed. "He turned it back on us!"

"And a few more minutes of it and all three of us would have been dead of old age," Crater said grimly. "You were right, Halleck—if Drummond stays loose with that thing he'll wreck the world!"

"But how—what——" Manly was attempting to ask.

"If I'd thought to turn this projector ahead on Drummond!" Halleck exclaimed suddenly, conscious for the first time that he still clutched the projector.

"You couldn't have—but here comes Dorsey," Crater said.

Through the little crowd of excited persons gathering around the wrecked police-car Policeman Dorsey hastened from the Drummond house farther down the street.

"Chief, what's happened?" he cried to Crater. "McNamara back there——" Then Dorsey took in the changed appearance of the three.

"But what happened to you?" he exclaimed. "You all look a dozen years older!"

"Never mind about us!" Crater's voice was steely. "What about McNamara?"

"He's dead! And he looks—you won't believe it—but he looks as though he died of old age!"

Captain Crater nodded grimly. "All right, Dorsey. Find the nearest phone and order another squad-car sent up here. Also tell them to send out a general alarm for a black-haired, black-eyed man of twenty or twenty-one carrying a thing like a camera."

And as Dorsey sped away on the errand and Crater and Manly and Doctor Halleck started back down the street toward the Drummond house, Crater said, "There's a chance Drummond can be picked up before he can use that damned thing further."

"And if he isn't?" Halleck questioned. "If Drummond escapes by means of his power as he did from us?"

Crater answered between set teeth. "In that case, hell is going to break loose!"

CAPTAIN CRATER repeated his words a few hours later down in the big building of police headquarters. He and Manly and Doctor Halleck sat in the office of the police commissioner, with the heavy, serious-faced commissioner Peter

Winston and the hard-visaged chief of detectives Mart Tuttle.

Winston and Tuttle listened intently to Crater's rapid account. Already, Halleck knew, the far-flung web of the metropolitan police system was vibrating with descriptions of Wilse Drummond and orders to hold him if found.

"It means hell itself if Drummond isn't taken!" Captain Crater was saying. "With that thing he can reduce human organizations to chaos!"

Commissioner Winston shook his head slowly, his face uneasy. "Crater, this is almost beyond belief. If I hadn't seen McNamara's body and the change in you and Manly, I'd think it was incredible."

"You'll find nothing incredible about it if Drummond starts to use it," Crater predicted. "For him to start selling youth to those who could pay high enough—it would turn the world upside down!"

"It would that!" said Chief Detective Tuttle in crisp agreement. "The man and his machine have got to be picked up before the thing goes further."

"It won't be easy," Winston said thoughtfully. "If the thing will actually make your Drummond able to age or rejuvenate at will, as you say, it will enable him to elude us better than any disguise. Also he can use the aging force as a weapon, as he did against you."

"Yet we've got a weapon against him too if we had a chance to use it," Crater reminded. "This other projector that Halleck took—it ought to be a check on Drummond's plans."

They looked curiously at the oblong black case that Doctor Halleck still held. "And that thing can age or rejuvenate any living body?" said Commissioner Winston half unbelievingly.

"Why don't you use it then to bring yourselves back to your normal age?" Tuttle asked, and Captain Crater nodded.

"We will—we've not had time until now. We may as well now, though, Halleck—ten years of added age has made me pretty weary in the last half-hour."

Doctor Halleck stood up, the projector in his grasp. Captain Crater stepped over and stood in front of its lens. Halleck was about to switch on the thing when Tuttle interposed.

"Wait!" said the chief detective. "You'll be meeting this Drummond again, if you can find him. In that case you ought to be as young as possible."

They stared. "Don't you see?" Tuttle asked. "The younger you are, the longer you can stand Drummond's aging-ray when you do meet him, and the better chance you'll have against him!"

"That's right," Commissioner Winston said. "You ought to be as young as the thing can make you."

"They're right, Halleck," said Captain Crater. "Send me back to about twenty, then, if you can."

Doctor Halleck, with unsteady fingers, snapped the projector's switch to the left. The buzzing of its action sounded from within.

Halleck held the lens steady upon Crater, the invisible rejuvenating radiations flooding the officer's elderly figure. The others watched intently.

Crater grew swiftly younger! The age-lines in his face vanished rapidly as though smoothed by an unseen hand. His hair changed from gray to dark, his eyes became clearer, his posture straighter and shoulders broader.

Winston and Tuttle were white-faced as they saw Crater going back through that quick process of rejuvenation—back through middle age, through late youth, until Crater was a robust, healthy young man of twenty. Halleck snapped off the projector.

"Well?" said Crater, his clear youthful

voice a little unsteady. "Do I look too young for a detective-captain?"

"By God, the thing's weird!" Winston exclaimed. "But go on—you too, Manly."

Manly took Crater's place in front of the projector and rapidly went back from middle age through the late twenties that were his normal age to a youthfulness matching Crater's.

"Now, you, Halleck," said Crater, taking the projector.

"Not back to a youth like that!" Doctor Halleck exclaimed. "I just want to get back to my own age and stay there!"

"You must do it, Halleck," Captain Crater said. "Don't you see?—you know more about Wilse Drummond and his work and the projectors than any one else. We've got to have your help and you've got to be as young as possible if we meet Drummond again."

Halleck hesitated, fighting his instinctive repulsion. "All right," he said. "Hold the projector's lens toward me and turn the switch to the left——"

Moments passed as he stood in the tingling invisible radiations, and when Crater turned them off Halleck too stood a youth of twenty. He stumbled into a chair, for despite his abrupt consciousness of unwonted youth and vigor, he felt momentarily nerveless.

"You too?" said Crater to Winston and Tuttle, nodding toward the projector. They shook their heads.

"Not for a million," Tuttle declared. "It's too damned uncanny."

"It's that, all right, and nothing would give me greater pleasure than to smash the thing," Crater said, "but before we do that we've got to get Drummond and the other projector.

"To get Drummond," he added, "we've got to keep a net out for him no matter what age he may be, from sixteen to ninety-six. For if we look only for a young man, Drummond will make himself old and so elude us, or if we look for an old one he'll——"

The door burst open and an orderly entered. "Riot up at Sixth and Thirtieth, sir!" he reported to Commissioner Winston.

"Sixth and—what started a riot there?" Winston shot at him.

"I don't know, sir, but the patrolman who rang in a minute ago yelled something to me about people suddenly getting older and younger——"

"Drummond!" Crater exclaimed. "Drummond's using his power already!"

In brief minutes they were in a police car speeding northwestward across lower New York. Doctor Halleck, numbed by the swiftness and incredibility of events, sat between Winston and Tuttle in the rear seat, holding the projector. Crater and Manly were beside the driver, and two cars crowded with policemen followed theirs.

As they shot west on Thirtieth Street from Broadway they found the Sixth Avenue intersection ahead blocked to traffic by a crowd of excited people that had overflowed from the sidewalks into the streets and had stopped vehicles from proceeding further. From this mob came an uproar of voices, the early-afternoon crowds gathering quickly.

As the occupants of the police-cars emerged, Doctor Halleck saw that the center of excitement was some scores of men and women, some extremely aged and others very youthful, who appeared mad with terror.

Many of them were mouthing meaningless cries while others were staring at their reflections in shop windows or at their companions. With sinking heart Doctor Halleck saw that many of the

white-haired old people were dressed in youthfully cut clothes that hung oddly loose upon them, a snow-headed old man in a snappy golf-suit, two senile, bent old women in the latest short skirts and jaunty hats, another ancient, wrinkled-faced man in a messenger boy's uniform.

Similarly some of the most youthful-looking of the crowd were attired in oddly unyouthful fashion. A stiff silk hat, frock coat and starched wing-collar were worn by a stripling of sixteen who appeared dazed. A fresh young girl wore a black silk dress and bonnet of old-fashioned style. A street-cleaner's uniform was worn by another boy of sixteen or seventeen.

"Drummond!" Doctor Halleck's voice was shaking. "Drummond's turned the age and rejuvenation rays loose indiscriminately here——"

"Scatter around the whole intersection!" Captain Crater's clear voice ordered the policemen who had emerged from the other cars. "Don't let any one here get away and if you see any one using a thing like a camera with a big lens, get him if you have to shoot!"

A thin, white-headed oldster with a patrolman's uniform hanging loose on him tottered up to them. "Patrolman Casey, sir!" he told Commissioner Winston in a cracked voice. "There's hell going on here!"

"What happened?" Winston asked. "When did this start?"

"Ten or twelve minutes ago!" the other said shrilly. "I was standing on the corner when I heard some people screaming. I looked and saw people changing, an old woman suddenly seeming to get young, two men aging. Then I felt a tingling through me and was old and weak like this myself. Old—and I'm only thirty-four!"

"Did you see a man with a black case like a camera?" Crater asked him tensely. "Or a package about the size of a camera—just when this happened?"

Patrolman Casey shook his white head. "No—but yes, I did see an old fellow with a little square bundle going along the sidewalk just then!"

"Drummond!" Crater exclaimed. "Drummond made himself old and disguised his projector as a package of some sort—turned the two forces loose at random as he went along! He's showing the world his power by this means, establishing it beyond doubt. What an unholy way to do it, though—making people young or old at random!"

"Crater, what are we going to do with these people?" asked Commissioner Winston desperately.

The scene in the street was now one of indescribable confusion. Crater's men had established a line around the intersection and were keeping any from entering or leaving, but inside it those suddenly made young or old were now screaming in panic.

Doctor Halleck grasped Crater's arm. "This projector!" he cried. "We can bring them back to normal with it—make them younger or older!" He indicated the projector he still held.

Crater nodded instantly. "By heaven, we can! It's all that will keep these people from going mad, too!"

"We'll round them up in one of these stores," he told Winston and Tuttle, "and Halleck can bring them back to normal with our projector!"

"All right, but for God's sake work fast!" Commissioner Winston told him. "This will have all New York in a panic if it goes on!"

Crater, Manly and Tuttle with a half-dozen policemen plunged into the crowd. Halleck saw them fighting to quiet the panic-stricken victims and to herd them

into one of the near-by stores. Some of those suddenly made old or young were still rational enough to follow the commands of the policemen, but others, shrieking in their terror, had to be dragged into the store-room commandeered by Crater.

As this rounding-up of the victims of Drummond's ray proceeded, Halleck's eyes roved everywhere in search of the man who had let loose this storm of panic, Wilse Drummond himself. He could see him nowhere, nor, he told himself, was there any chance that Drummond would have lingered here. He had simply passed along dealing age and youth at random from his concealed projector and letting the resulting turmoil develop of itself behind him.

THE turmoil was quieting a little now as Captain Crater and Manly and Tuttle with their men gradually herded the victims into the store-room chosen. Halleck gave up his looking for Drummond and went with Winston into that store-room, the projector in his hand.

There were about seventy men and women in the store-room, including the seven or eight prone forms the policemen had carried in. Doctor Halleck bent with Crater and the others over these first, heedless for the moment of the hysterical uproar of the others.

"Dead," said Halleck in a moment. "All dead of old age. These are old people Drummond happened to catch with the aging-ray."

"Some of these others are going to be dead of terror in a few minutes if we don't do something," Captain Crater said grimly.

He raised his voice above the uproar. "You people who were made younger or older—we can make you as you were before, do you hear? Doctor Halleck can change you back to the age you were before!"

The terror-crazed victims surged toward the officers. A girl of seventeen or eighteen in clothing that seemed too old for her had by the arm a feeble white-haired old man. "My husband and I!" she screamed. "We were both forty-two, and out there in the street we changed—he grew older and I younger!"

"We'll change you back," Crater reassured. To Doctor Halleck he said, "We'll start on these people, Halleck! We can take them one at a time."

While policemen kept curious crowds and reporters outside from entering the store-room, the work in it proceeded. A tall mirror was found and set up, and beside this Doctor Halleck stood with his projector while the hysterical victims were allowed to come forward one at a time.

The first was the patrolman, Casey. Placing him before the mirror Halleck turned the rejuvenation ray on him. As Casey saw himself growing rapidly younger, in the mirror, he seemed dazed but was able to signal to Halleck when he had reached his normal middle-aged appearance. Halleck turned the ray off and the messenger-boy who had been aged into an old man took Casey's place.

Quickly the work went on, those in the store-room watching incredulously and scarce able to believe their eyes even when they themselves were restored to normal age by the projector. Halleck had half expected some of those made young would decline to enter the ray and be made old again, but this was not the case. This strange youth that had come upon them so suddenly was terrifying to them, throwing time back and lifting them out of their normal place in the world, and they desired nothing but to get back to their familiar older age.

In three-quarters of an hour all of the victims save those killed by senility had been restored to their usual age, and somewhat stunned but otherwise all right, had stumbled out. Doctor Halleck, weary despite his new youthful vigor, remained with Commissioner Winston and Crater and Manly, Tuttle having gone to help in the search for Wilse Drummond.

Commissioner Winston wiped his brow. "This thing will soon have New York crazy," he said. "The reporters out there are foaming at the mouth to find out what changed the age of those people and how we restored them to normal."

"Let them foam," said Crater curtly. "If they hear about Wilse Drummond and realize a man is running wild with that power, there'll be a still worse panic."

"They'll learn about Drummond sooner or later," Winston said, "and when——"

An excited policeman pushed to the side of the commissioner. "Chief Detective Tuttle wants you up at the Maxson Theater at once, sir!" he reported.

Instant apprehension crossed Winston's face. "What's happened there? Is it another——"

"He said to bring Doctor Halleck and his projector with you!" the other said.

Captain Crater laughed grimly. "Drummond is not wasting time, it seems. Come on, Halleck!"

Ten minutes later the police-cars drew up on West Forty-eighth Street before the square cream-colored bulk of the new Maxson Theater.

Here also there was a tangle of traffic and a horde of excited people on the sidewalk. They pushed through them into the theater, Halleck between Crater and Manly.

The theater was full of people in a state of panic, the matinee crowd that a little before had been witnessing a performance of that world-famed revue, Maxson's Follies. Policemen posted at the doors kept them from leaving, and one of these led Winston, Crater and Halleck around into the wings of the big stage.

There was excitement there too, performers in brilliant costumes or in dressing-gowns exhibiting the same panic as the audience. Tuttle came to meet Winston and Crater and Halleck.

"Your Drummond at work again!" he exclaimed. "He must have come straight up here after what he did down there at Sixth and Thirtieth!"

"What did he do?" Crater asked quickly.

Tuttle pointed to where many of the performers had gathered around a dozen hysterical women. The dozen women were old, their faces wrinkled and figures shrunken, hair white. Yet they were dressed in the abbreviated costumes of modern revue dancers.

"That's what he did," said Tuttle grimly.

Tuttle told briefly what had happened. The matinee performance of Maxson's Follies had just begun, and the twelve featured dancers were engaged under a golden glow of light in their intricate evolutions, patterns of brilliant costumes and youthful beauty following the lilt of the music.

Then the patterns had become suddenly confused, the dancers stumbling against each other, some falling, and at the same time women in the audience had screamed. The dancers were one by one, so swiftly that the eye could hardly follow it, growing old, aging from fresh youth to senility, their hair whitening and their bodies withering!

The policeman on duty in the wings had instantly called headquarters but when Tuttle had arrived he had found that though most of the audience was still there, some of them had escaped in panic.

"There's not a doubt but that Wilse Drummond was in the audience and turned the aging ray upon the dancers, then got away before we came," Tuttle said.

"My God, what a thing to do!" Halleck exclaimed. "But it's like Drummond's sardonic mind to do it!"

"Drummond is taking the best way to let the world learn his power, surely," Captain Crater said. "Well, we can undo his work."

Quickly with the projector's rejuvenating forces Halleck restored the twelve dancers to their normal youth. But hardly had he done so when there came more evidence that Wilse Drummond was ranging the city unsparingly with his dread power.

This was a call from an afternoon political meeting in a hall in lower New York. Two well-known candidates for United States senator had been holding there a public debate on the issues involved.

When Halleck arrived with Crater and the other officers at the panic-filled hall, it took some time to learn what had happened. The two candidates, both serious and dignified elderly men, had been on the platform of the hall, one speaking forcefully and the other awaiting his turn to speak.

Then the incredible had happened. The dignified speaker had suddenly, swiftly, grown younger! His gray hair had darkened, his figure had changed, he had gone back through middle age and through youth and stood before the astonished audience as a rosy-cheeked boy of sixteen in an elderly man's clothing! And before the stunned audience could credit their eyes the other candidate had grown similarly younger, so that two striplings held the platform.

Wilse Drummond had undoubtedly entered the hall and with the same sardonic humor had transformed the two eminent statesmen into boys. And even before Halleck had restored to the two stunned men their normal age, further alarms of Drummond's activities were coming.

Halleck felt panic seizing upon him as it was seizing upon New York, as he and Crater and Manly sped from one to another of the scenes of Drummond's continuing deeds.

For Drummond seemed deliberately working to throw New York into panic. No other hypothesis could explain his actions.

Youths and girls pouring out of a high-school found suddenly that a dozen or more among them had abruptly grown to middle age. Conversely, a half-dozen inmates of a home for the aged, senile men and women, were suddenly restored to youth.

At a boxing-bout being witnessed by a large crowd, Drummond must have been present; for one of the two fighters suddenly became a tottering, aged man and in the next moment the other was by an opposite change a youthful stripling. They faced each other as thunder-struck as the crowd.

Drummond was using his power in the streets, too, with the most deadly effects. In place after place, as the afternoon progressed, there were riots where Drummond had passed along the streets and turned his concealed projector right and left into the crowds. A son would find himself suddenly older than his parents—

a grandfather as young as his grandson.

And as hour followed hour and Doctor Halleck sped with Captain Crater and Manly and Tuttle from place to place, following Drummond's trail and undoing Drummond's terrible work with the projector Halleck held, terror was spreading through New York and penetrating every crack and corner of the vast city.

It was a terror of the unknown. None but the police knew Wilse Drummond to be responsible for the stunning phenomena of the day, and so these strange visitations of age and youth on people at random stirred deepest dread. Then it became known that the police were somehow, incredibly, able to make normal again those made younger or older.

But it was none the less panic-striking. As the screaming newspapers spread the incredible news, the crowds in the streets became thinner. None knew but that the invisible power would reach to touch them next, hurling them out of their normal age into strange senility or youth, perhaps into death. The city was afraid.

And Halleck was afraid. For as he and Crater worked with the projector to restore the hysterical victims of Drummond, Drummond's terrible power was more and more clear to his eyes.

"Crater, if Drummond isn't taken soon he'll have New York wrecked!" Halleck said as in a police car he and Crater and Manly sped back through the bright-lit streets toward police headquarters from the scene of the latest panic.

NEWSBOYS were shouting extras on every corner but the usual night-time crowds were not on the streets. They looked oddly deserted.

"Halleck's right," Manly said. "Look at these streets—people afraid to go out already, and Drummond's been out with this thing for only one day!"

"We'll get Drummond!" Captain Crater told them with iron-like determination. "He's not superhuman, even with the powers he has, and he can't get away from the whole police system indefinitely."

But when they reached police headquarters and entered the office of Commissioner Winston, they found a new situation. The faces of Winston and Tuttle were grim when the three entered the bright-lit office, and without explanation Winston cut off Crater's words and handed him a black-headlined newspaper.

"Read that," he said. "It came out a quarter-hour ago."

Halleck read over Crater's shoulder. The newspaper's whole front page was occupied by a huge-typed letter that had been received by all of New York's newspapers less than an hour before.

"To the People of New York," it read. "The strange changes in age of people throughout the city today, the rejuvenation of some persons and the aging of others, are not supernatural in cause. I, Professor Wilse Drummond of Manhattan University, retired, caused them by the power of controlling human age that I have developed. The police who have been hunting me today can verify this statement.

"As long as the police continue to search for me I will continue to use my powers at random as I have done today. I will not stop until the civil and police officials of New York make public announcement that the search for me has stopped, and guarantee me immunity from arrest or molestation. When such announcement is made I will halt my present activities and use my age-control process in a legitimate manner. Wilse Drummond."

There was a moment's silence in the

office. "Blackmail!" Crater finally said. "Drummond's trying to blackmail the city into giving him immunity!"

"He's not only trying," Commissioner Winston said heavily. "He's succeeding."

"What do you mean?" Crater asked quickly.

"Crater, the mayor has just been here and the governor was on the phone. They order me to make the announcement guaranteeing Drummond immunity."

"But you can't!" Doctor Halleck cried. "Do you realize what it means? Wilse Drummond free to sell youth to the highest bidder—the whole world in awe of him, fawning on him——"

"Give us more time, Winston!" pleaded Crater. "We can get Drummond if we have time enough, and smash this whole hellish business!"

Winston shook his head. "If it was mine to say, I would. But I've got my orders and I've got to do it—have to send the announcement out now. God knows I hate to do it."

He turned to the door, but before he could open it, it swung wide and disclosed an excited orderly, with behind him a dazed-looking stripling of sixteen or seventeen who wore thick glasses and clothes that seemed too old for him.

"This fellow says some one changed his age and other people's over on Broadway just now!" cried the orderly. "He says he saw a man there using a projector openly! His name's Harbison."

"You saw Drummond?" Captain Crater cried. "Just now?"

"I saw a man there," Harbison answered dazedly. "He had a thing like a camera and was turning it on people—he turned it toward me and I changed like this! I'm forty years old, a lawyer, but grew younger in a moment until I was like this! I ran over here——"

"By heaven, Drummond using his projector openly!" Crater cried. "Winston, it may be a chance to get him—let us try it before you send that announcement!"

Winston hesitated. "Do, it's a last chance at Drummond before we give up!" Tuttle cried.

"All right, we'll take it!" Winston said briefly. "Come on!"

THEY ran for the door, Halleck with them with his projector. Harbison, the stripling who had brought them the word, ran after, clutched at Crater's arm.

"What about me? I've got to get back to my own age again—I've got to——" His voice rose to a ragged, nerve-torn scream.

"Halleck, bring this fellow back to his own age!" Crater flung to the biologist. "Then come over after us—there'll be more there for you to work on!"

Then Crater and Winston and Tuttle and Manly were gone, the excited orderly with them. From outside came the roar of the police cars speeding away.

Halleck turned back to Harbison, alone now in Winston's office with him. Harbison was closing the office door.

"All right!" Halleck snapped. "There's no time to lose! Stand over here and I'll bring you back to your own age with this projector. You can tell me from the mirror there when you're normal."

"Wait a minute!" pleaded the other. "I can't do it for a minute——" He sank into a chair, his face in his hands.

Halleck, with an exclamation of tense impatience, waited. Despite his own rejuvenation, the youth the projector had given to him as to Crater and Manly, Halleck felt a deadly weariness.

If Crater and the others could take Drummond, even this late! But Halleck's numbed mind knew the slenderness of this last chance—it would fail and the announcement of immunity would be

made and Wilse Drummond would be free to work horror in the world by setting up his sale of youth. Tingling horror again swept Halleck at that thought.

Tingling—but no, it was not horror but force that was tingling through his body! Tingling force like that of the projector of the aging and rejuvenation rays! And as Doctor Halleck came to that startling realization he heard the buzz of the projector's operation!

He looked down, but the projector in his hands was not turned on! Nor did the buzz come from it! Halleck was aware of sudden increased weariness, weakness, *oldness!* Then his dazed eyes saw that across the room the stripling Harbison was not now sitting in his chair by the door, but standing, that from under his coat he had taken the oblong black case of a projector whose quartz lens was full upon Halleck, and that Harbison's youthful features, his black eyes behind the thick glasses, were——

"Wilse Drummond!" Halleck yelled, and was aware from the deep pitch of his voice that Drummond's ray had already aged him from youth to middle age!

"Yes, Drummond!" cried the other. "You didn't think I'd let you keep the projector you stole from me, Halleck? I'm going to use my power as I planned and I'm going to use it alone, not with you undoing what I do as you have done all this day——"

He stopped as Halleck, with desperate swiftness, clicked the switch of the projector in his own hands to the right, turned its aging-ray upon Drummond!

For a moment they stood with rays turned upon each other, both Drummond and Halleck growing older with each moment, though Halleck was the elder. Then with an exclamation Wilse Drummond reached to the wall-switch behind him and snapped off the lights. The office was plunged in darkness.

They stood in that darkness, projectors buzzing, and then Halleck moved quickly to one side. He felt no more the tingling and knew he was out of range of Drummond's ray. Halleck turned his own projector off, heard and placed the buzz of Drummond's in the darkness. He turned his own ray in that direction.

He heard Drummond move hastily in the darkness in a moment and knew he had reached him with his force. Drummond's projector stopped buzzing and instantly Halleck shut off his lest Drummond place him in the dark.

There was no sound. Halleck's heart was beating rapidly. This was the weirdest of duels, surely, between Drummond and him, two men fighting in darkness with age as the weapon, the loser to die by senility.

Halleck thought of shouting for help—but that too would give away his position in the darkness to Drummond. To open the door would be as fatal, for it would disclose him against the lighted hall outside. But if Crater and the rest would return!

Drummond had sent Crater and the others on a false errand in order to get this chance at Halleck and his projector. Once he had both projectors, and with immunity against further search by the police, Drummond would indeed be winner. Halleck set his teeth.

DRUMMOND'S projector buzzed in the darkness like an alarmed snake and its tingling force shot through Halleck. At once Halleck leapt to escape it, but Drummond followed him by the sound. Halleck stopped, turned his own age-ray desperately through the darkness.

He heard Drummond in turn move, bump against a chair or the desk in the room's corner. He kept his ray turned on that corner a moment, then turned it off. Halleck was feeling very tired and

weak, knew that in the times it had struck him Drummond's ray had made him decades older.

But Drummond too had been hit by his ray—must be middle-aged, at least. In the next moment Halleck again heard Drummond move and shot his invisible aging-ray through the darkness. Again Drummond moved hastily out of it. He was at least evening their ages, Halleck knew.

They fought on through the darkness in the strange combat. Deadly, silent, it went on—Halleck and Drummond moving with infinite care around opposite sides of the dark office, loosing their aging-forces at each suspicion of a sound from each other.

Halleck felt himself very old, with a weakness of age upon him that made it hard for him to move silently. He knew that Drummond too must by then be old, though whether older or younger than himself he could not guess. The time they had carried on the unearthly duel seemed infinite to him, though he knew it could have been but minutes.

Moving with ever greater weakness, his projector and Drummond's buzzing in the darkness at each sound, Halleck knew he could not long continue the fight.

He was beside the desk, now, and a desperate resolve took him—a resolve to end the thing one way or another.

He set his projector on the desk's corner, lens facing into the room. Then he snapped on the age-ray and leapt silently away from the desk.

As the projector buzzed, Drummond's buzzed in swift answer across the room. Halleck crept quickly around the room's edge through the darkness toward the sound of Drummond's projector. He heard Drummond turn it off, then leapt through the darkness toward him.

He struck Drummond, clutched him, and they struggled—Drummond's projector knocked from his hands by the shock. They fought together in the darkness. Halleck's blows were feeble, his grip weak, but Drummond's were as weak or weaker. Two old men who moments before had been young, struggling in the dark room! The projector on the desk still buzzed.

Halleck reeled with Drummond toward the desk, felt the tingling force of the aging-ray sweeping through them. Drummond felt it and sought to break loose but Halleck held him fiercely. His strength was fast waning as the ray made both of them swiftly older. The one of them who was oldest would first die of old age, Halleck knew!

Staggering himself, Halleck clawed to hold Drummond with him in the ray—to end it one way or another! Halleck felt the tingling force making him older and older still, as desperately he held Drummond, older—weaker—he felt himself swaying, consciousness going——

Then Drummond slipped limply from his grasp, struck the floor with a thump! Halleck, with a tremendous last effort of his waning faculties, reached a hand through the darkness to the buzzing projector and snapped it off. Then, clutching the desk for support, he sank nervelessly beside Drummond.

LIGHT suddenly flooded the room, almost blinding Halleck's dim eyes. He heard voices crying out excitedly, feet running and hands supporting him, but for the moment could see nothing clearly but the motionless form on the floor beside him.

Wilse Drummond lay there, his body shrivelled, face withered and hair snow-white—old—*old*—dead of senility.

Halleck, looking dazedly into the mirror opposite, saw himself as a white-haired, twisted ancient as old almost as

Drummond. Crater and Winston and the rest gathered excitedly about him.

"You got him with the age-ray, Halleck!" Crater was crying. "You got Drummond!"

"Crater—the other ray——" uttered Halleck in a cracked voice.

Captain Crater was already taking the projector from the desk, turning the rejuvenation force upon Halleck. In the mirror Halleck saw age fall from him, as he grew younger into a man of seventy-five, one of sixty-five, one of sixty—his normal age.

"That's enough!" he said.

Crater turned the ray off and Halleck stood the scholarly, gray-haired Doctor Halleck he had been until that day.

"Crater, you and Manly?" he said.

"Yes," Crater answered. "For God's sake let's get back to normal."

In moments the aging-ray had made them their usual ages, Crater the middle-aged detective-captain, Manly his younger aide.

"And now——" said Crater.

He swung up his pistol by the barrel, its butt a hammer hanging over the two black projectors.

"Go on!" Halleck said. "Smash them before some one else tries to use them!"

"Go ahead!" Winston nodded. "If you don't now we'll lose our nerve and keep the damn things!"

Crash! Crash! Crater's pistol-butt smashed into shattered glass and wire and metal the potential rejuvenation of humanity.

He stood up and they looked at the dead Drummond and his smashed projectors, then at one another. Then they turned to the door, Tuttle's voice excited as they went out, Winston and Halleck looking back, Crater turning the light off as he closed the office door. Silent beside the shattered metal and glass fragments, looking up into the darkness with frozen, age-distorted face, lay the man who had conquered age.

Thrice Haunted

By ALFRED I. TOOKE

I am thrice haunted! Every night I see
Three haunting faces peering in at me.

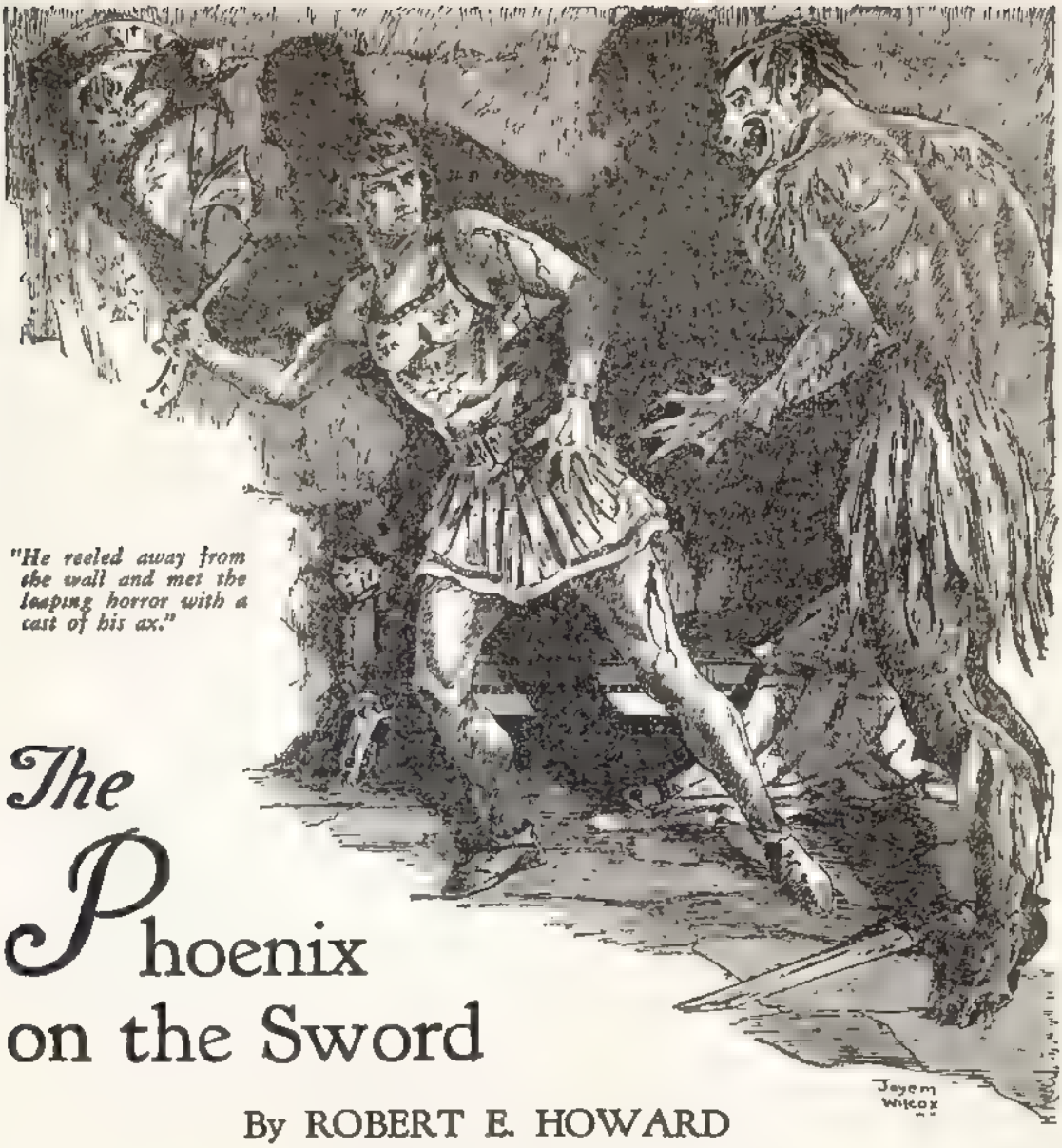
A beggar's face. He asked for alms. I said:
"Out of my way!" They found him later—dead!

A brother's face. He asked forgiveness. I
Sent him away to prison, there to die.

A mother's face. She asked a promise true.
I broke my word. Her heart was broken, too.

Pull down the blind, you say, and shut them out?
They haunt me from within—not from without.

W. T.—3



"He reeled away from the wall and met the leaping horror with a cast of his ax."

The Phoenix on the Sword

By ROBERT E. HOWARD

A soul-searing story of a fearsome monster spawned in darkness before the first man crawled out of the slimy sea

"Know, oh prince, that between the years when the oceans drank Atlantis and the gleaming cities, and the years of the rise of the Sons of Aryas, there was an Age undreamed of, when shining kingdoms lay spread across the world like blue mantles beneath the stars—Nemedia, Ophir, Brythunia, Hyperborea, Zamora with its dark-haired women and towers of spider-haunted mystery, Zingara with its chivalry, Koth that bordered on the pastoral lands of Shem, Stygia with its shadow-guarded tombs, Hyrkania whose riders wore steel and silk and gold. But the proudest kingdom of the world was Aquilonia, reigning supreme in the dreaming west. Hither came Conan, the Cimmerian, black-haired, sullen-eyed, sword in hand, a thief, a reaver, a slayer, with gigantic melancholies and gigantic mirth, to tread the jeweled thrones of the Earth under his sandalled feet." —*The Nemedian Chronicles.*

OVER shadowy spires and gleaming towers lay the ghostly darkness and silence that runs before dawn. Into a dim alley, one of a veritable labyrinth of mysterious winding ways,

four masked figures came hurriedly from a door which a dusky hand furtively opened. They spoke not but went swiftly into the gloom, cloaks wrapped closely about them; as silently as the ghosts of murdered men they disappeared in the darkness. Behind them a sardonic countenance was framed in the partly opened door; a pair of evil eyes glittered malevolently in the gloom.

"Go into the night, creatures of the night," a voice mocked. "Oh, fools, your doom hounds your heels like a blind dog, and you know it not."

The speaker closed the door and bolted it, then turned and went up the corridor, candle in hand. He was a somber giant, whose dusky skin revealed his Stygian blood. He came into an inner chamber, where a tall, lean man in worn velvet lounged like a great lazy cat on a silken couch, sipping wine from a huge golden goblet.

"Well, Ascalante," said the Stygian, setting down the candle, "your dupes have slunk into the streets like rats from their burrows. You work with strange tools."

"Tools?" replied Ascalante. "Why, they consider *me* that. For months now, ever since the Rebel Four summoned me from the southern desert, I have been living in the very heart of my enemies, hiding by day in this obscure house, skulking through dark alleys and darker corridors at night. And I have accomplished what those rebellious nobles could not. Working through them, and through other agents, many of whom have never seen my face, I have honeycombed the empire with sedition and unrest. In short I, working in the shadows, have paved the downfall of the king who sits throned in the sun. By Mitra, I was a statesman before I was an outlaw."

"And these dupes who deem themselves your masters?"

"They will continue to think that I serve them, until our present task is completed. Who are they to match wits with Ascalante? Volmana, the dwarfish count of Karaban; Gromel, the giant commander of the Black Legion; Dion, the fat baron of Attalus; Rinaldo, the harebrained minstrel. I am the force which has welded together the steel in each, and by the clay in each, I will crush them when the time comes. But that lies in the future; tonight the king dies."

"Days ago I saw the imperial squadrons ride from the city," said the Stygian.

"They rode to the frontier which the heathen Picts assail—thanks to the strong liquor which I've smuggled over the borders to madden them. Dion's great wealth made *that* possible. And Volmana made it possible to dispose of the rest of the imperial troops which remained in the city. Through his princely kin in Nemedia, it was easy to persuade King Numa to request the presence of Count Trocero of Poitain, seneschal of Aquilonia; and of course, to do him honor, he'll be accompanied by an imperial escort, as well as his own troops, and Prospero, King Conan's right-hand man. That leaves only the king's personal bodyguard in the city—besides the Black Legion. Through Gromel I've corrupted a spendthrift officer of that guard, and bribed him to lead his men away from the king's door at midnight.

"Then, with sixteen desperate rogues of mine, we enter the palace by a secret tunnel. After the deed is done, even if the people do not rise to welcome us, Gromel's Black Legion will be sufficient to hold the city and the crown."

"And Dion thinks that crown will be given to him?"

"Yes. The fat fool claims it by reason of a trace of royal blood. Conan makes a bad mistake in letting men live who still boast descent from the old dynasty,

from which he tore the crown of Aquilonia.

"Volmana wishes to be reinstated in royal favor as he was under the old regime, so that he may lift his poverty-ridden estates to their former grandeur. Gromel hates Pallantides, commander of the Black Dragons, and desires the command of the whole army, with all the stubbornness of the Bossonian. Alone of us all, Rinaldo has no personal ambition. He sees in Conan a red-handed, rough-footed barbarian who came out of the north to plunder a civilized land. He idealizes the king whom Conan killed to get the crown, remembering only that he occasionally patronized the arts, and forgetting the evils of his reign, and he is making the people forget. Already they openly sing *The Lament for the King* in which Rinaldo lauds the sainted villain and denounces Conan as 'that black-hearted savage from the abyss.' Conan laughs, but the people snarl."

"Why does he hate Conan?"

"Poets always hate those in power. To them perfection is always just behind the last corner, or beyond the next. They escape the present in dreams of the past and future. Rinaldo is a flaming torch of idealism, rising, as he thinks, to overthrow a tyrant and liberate the people. As for me—well, a few months ago I had lost all ambition but to raid the caravans for the rest of my life; now old dreams stir. Conan will die; Dion will mount the throne. Then he, too, will die. One by one, all who oppose me will die—by fire, or steel, or those deadly wines you know so well how to brew. Ascalante, king of Aquilonia! How like you the sound of it?"

The Stygian shrugged his broad shoulders.

"There was a time," he said with unconcealed bitterness, "when I, too, had my ambitions, beside which yours seem tawdry and childish. To what a state I have fallen! My old-time peers and rivals would stare indeed could they see Thoth-Amon of the Ring serving as the slave of an outlander, and an outlaw at that; and aiding in the petty ambitions of barons and kings!"

"You laid your trust in magic and mummery," answered Ascalante carelessly. "I trust my wits and my sword."

"Wits and swords are as straws against the wisdom of the Darkness," growled the Stygian, his dark eyes flickering with menacing lights and shadows. "Had I not lost the Ring, our positions might be reversed."

"Nevertheless," answered the outlaw impatiently, "you wear the stripes of my whip on your back, and are likely to continue to wear them."

"Be not so sure!" the fiendish hatred of the Stygian glittered for an instant redly in his eyes. "Some day, somehow, I will find the Ring again, and when I do, by the serpent-fangs of Set, you shall pay——"

THE hot-tempered Aquilonian started up and struck him heavily across the mouth. Thoth reeled back, blood starting from his lips.

"You grow over-bold, dog," growled the outlaw. "Have a care; I am still your master who knows your dark secret. Go upon the housetops and shout that Ascalante is in the city plotting against the king—if you dare."

"I dare not," muttered the Stygian, wiping the blood from his lips.

"No, you do not dare," Ascalante grinned bleakly. "For if I die by your stealth or treachery, a hermit priest in the southern desert will know of it, and will break the seal of a manuscript I left in his hands. And having read, a word will

be whispered in Stygia, and a wind will creep up from the south by midnight. And where will you hide your head, Thoth-Amon?"

The slave shuddered and his dusky face went ashen.

"Enough!" Ascalante changed his tone peremptorily. "I have work for you. I do not trust Dion. I bade him ride to his country estate and remain there until the work tonight is done. The fat fool could never conceal his nervousness before the king today. Ride after him, and if you do not overtake him on the road, proceed to his estate and remain with him until we send for him. Don't let him out of your sight. He is mazed with fear, and might bolt—might even rush to Conan in a panic, and reveal the whole plot, hoping thus to save his own hide. Go!"

The slave bowed, hiding the hate in his eyes, and did as he was bidden. Ascalante turned again to his wine. Over the jeweled spires was rising a dawn crimson as blood.

2

When I was a fighting-man, the kettle-drums they beat,
The people scattered gold-dust before my horse's feet;
But now I am a great king, the people hound my track
With poison in my wine-cup, and daggers at my back.

—*The Road of Kings.*

THE room was large and ornate, with rich tapestries on the polished-panelled walls, deep rugs on the ivory floor, and with the lofty ceiling adorned with intricate carvings and silver scrollwork. Behind an ivory, gold-inlaid writing-table sat a man whose broad shoulders and sun-browned skin seemed out of place among those luxuriant surroundings. He seemed more a part of the sun and winds and high places of the outlands. His slightest movement spoke of steel-spring muscles knit to a keen brain with the co-ordination of a born fighting-man. There was nothing deliberate or measured about his actions. Either he was perfectly at rest—still as a bronze statue—or else he was in motion, not with the jerky quickness of over-tense nerves, but with a cat-like speed that blurred the sight which tried to follow him.

His garments were of rich fabric, but simply made. He wore no ring or ornaments, and his square-cut black mane was confined merely by a cloth-of-silver band about his head.

Now he laid down the golden stylus with which he had been laboriously scrawling on waxed papyrus, rested his chin on his fist, and fixed his smoldering blue eyes enviously on the man who stood before him. This person was occupied in his own affairs at the moment, for he was taking up the laces of his gold-chased armor, and abstractedly whistling—a rather unconventional performance, considering that he was in the presence of a king.

"Prospero," said the man at the table, "these matters of statecraft weary me as all the fighting I have done never did."

"All part of the game, Conan," answered the dark-eyed Poitainian. "You are king—you must play the part."

"I wish I might ride with you to Nemedia," said Conan enviously. "It seems ages since I had a horse between my knees—but Publius says that affairs in the city require my presence. Curse him!

"When I overthrew the old dynasty," he continued, speaking with the easy familiarity which existed only between the Poitainian and himself, "it was easy enough, though it seemed bitter hard at the time. Looking back now over the wild path I followed, all those days of toil, intrigue, slaughter and tribulation seem like a dream.

"I did not dream far enough, Prospero. When King Numedides lay dead at my feet and I tore the crown from his gory head and set it on my own, I had reached the ultimate border of my dreams. I had prepared myself to take the crown, not to hold it. In the old free days all I wanted was a sharp sword and a straight path to my enemies. Now no paths are straight and my sword is useless.

"When I overthrew Numedides, *then* I was the Liberator—now they spit at my shadow. They have put a statue of that swine in the temple of Mitra, and people go and wail before it, hailing it as the holy effigy of a saintly monarch who was done to death by a red-handed barbarian. When I led her armies to victory as a mercenary, Aquilonia overlooked the fact that I was a foreigner, but now she can not forgive me.

"Now in Mitra's temple there come to burn incense to Numedides' memory, men whom his hangmen maimed and blinded, men whose sons died in his dungeons, whose wives and daughters were dragged into his seraglio. The fickle fools!"

"Rinaldo is largely responsible," answered Prospero, drawing up his sword-belt another notch. "He sings songs that make men mad. Hang him in his jester's garb to the highest tower in the city. Let him make rimes for the vultures."

Conan shook his lion head. "No, Prospero, he's beyond my reach. A great poet is greater than any king. His songs are mightier than my scepter; for he has near ripped the heart from my breast when he chose to sing for me. I shall die and be forgotten, but Rinaldo's songs will live for ever.

"No, Prospero," the king continued, a somber look of doubt shadowing his eyes, "there is something hidden, some under-current of which we are not aware. I sense it as in my youth I sensed the tiger hidden in the tall grass. There is a nameless unrest throughout the kingdom. I am like a hunter who crouches by his small fire amid the forest, and hears stealthy feet padding in the darkness, and almost sees the glimmer of burning eyes. If I could but come to grips with something tangible, that I could cleave with my sword! I tell you, it's not by chance that the Picts have of late so fiercely assailed the frontiers, so that the Bossonians have called for aid to beat them back. I should have ridden with the troops."

"Publius feared a plot to trap and slay you beyond the frontier," replied Prospero, smoothing his silken surcoat over his shining mail, and admiring his tall lithe figure in a silver mirror. "That's why he urged you to remain in the city. These doubts are born of your barbarian instincts. Let the people snarl! The mercenaries are ours, and the Black Dragons, and every rogue in Poitain swears by you. Your only danger is assassination, and that's impossible, with men of the imperial troops guarding you day and night. What are you working at there?"

"A map," Conan answered with pride. "The maps of the court show well the countries of south, east and west, but in the north they are vague and faulty. I am adding the northern lands myself. Here is Cimmeria, where I was born. And——"

"Asgard and Vanaheim," Prospero scanned the map. "By Mitra, I had almost believed those countries to have been fabulous."

Conan grinned savagely, involuntarily touching the scars on his dark face. "You had known otherwise, had you spent your youth on the northern frontiers of Cimmeria! Asgard lies to the north, and Vanaheim to the northwest of Cimmeria,

and there is continual war along the borders."

"What manner of men are these northern folk?" asked Prospero.

"Tall and fair and blue-eyed. Their god is Ymir, the frost-giant, and each tribe has its own king. They are wayward and fierce. They fight all day and drink ale and roar their wild songs all night."

"Then I think you are like them," laughed Prospero. "You laugh greatly, drink deep and bellow good songs; though I never saw another Cimmerian who drank aught but water, or who ever laughed, or ever sang save to chant dismal dirges."

"Perhaps it's the land they live in," answered the king. "A gloomier land never was—all of hills, darkly wooded, under skies nearly always gray, with winds moaning drearily down the valleys."

"Little wonder men grow moody there," quoth Prospero with a shrug of his shoulders, thinking of the smiling sun-washed plains and blue lazy rivers of Poitain, Aquilonia's southernmost province.

"They have no hope here or hereafter," answered Conan. "Their gods are Crom and his dark race, who rule over a sunless place of everlasting mist, which is the world of the dead. Mitra! The ways of the Æsir were more to my liking."

"Well," grinned Prospero, "the dark hills of Cimmeria are far behind you. And now I go. I'll quaff a goblet of white Nemedian wine for you at Numa's court."

"Good," grunted the king, "but kiss Numa's dancing-girls for yourself only, lest you involve the states!"

His gusty laughter followed Prospero out of the chamber.

3

Under the caverned pyramids great Set coils asleep;
Among the shadows of the tombs his dusky people creep.
I speak the Word from the hidden gulfs that never knew the sun—
Send me a servant for my hate, oh scaled and shining One!

THE sun was setting, etching the green and hazy blue of the forest in brief gold. The waning beams glinted on the thick golden chain which Dion of Attalus twisted continually in his pudgy hand as he sat in the flaming riot of blossoms and flower-trees which was his garden. He shifted his fat body on his marble seat and glanced furtively about, as if in quest of a lurking enemy. He sat within a circular grove of slender trees, whose interlapping branches cast a thick shade over him. Near at hand a fountain tinkled silverly, and other unseen fountains in various parts of the great garden whispered an everlasting symphony.

Dion was alone except for the great dusky figure which lounged on a marble bench close at hand, watching the baron with deep somber eyes. Dion gave little thought to Thoth-Amon. He vaguely knew that he was a slave in whom Ascalante reposed much trust, but like so many rich men, Dion paid scant heed to men below his own station in life.

"You need not be so nervous," said Thoth. "The plot can not fail."

"Ascalante can make mistakes as well as another," snapped Dion, sweating at the mere thought of failure.

"Not he," grinned the Stygian savagely, "else I had not been his slave, but his master."

"What talk is this?" peevishly returned Dion, with only half a mind on the conversation.

Thoth-Amon's eyes narrowed. For all his iron-self-control, he was near bursting with long pent-up shame, hate and

rage, ready to take any sort of a desperate chance. What he did not reckon on was the fact that Dion saw him, not as a human being with a brain and a wit, but simply a slave, and as such, a creature beneath notice.

"Listen to me," said Thoth. "You will be king. But you little know the mind of Ascalante. You can not trust him, once Conan is slain. I can help you. If you will protect me when you come to power, I will aid you.

"Listen, my lord. I was a great sorcerer in the south. Men spoke of Thoth-Amon as they spoke of Rammon. King Ctesphon of Stygia gave me great honor, casting down the magicians from the high places to exalt me above them. They hated me, but they feared me, for I controlled beings from *outside* which came at my call and did my bidding. By Set, mine enemy knew not the hour when he might awake at midnight to feel the taloned fingers of a nameless horror at his throat! I did dark and terrible magic with the Serpent Ring of Set, which I found in a nighted tomb a league beneath the earth, forgotten before the first man crawled out of the slimy sea.

"But a thief stole the Ring and my power was broken. The magicians rose up to slay me, and I fled. Disguised as a camel-driver, I was travelling in a caravan in the land of Koth, when Ascalante's reavers fell upon us. All in the caravan were slain except myself; I saved my life by revealing my identity to Ascalante and swearing to serve him. Bitter has been that bondage!

"To hold me fast, he wrote of me in a manuscript, and sealed it and gave it into the hands of a hermit who dwells on the southern borders of Koth. I dare not strike a dagger into him while he sleeps, or betray him to his enemies, for then the hermit would open the manuscript and read—thus Ascalante instructed him. And he would speak a word in Stygia——"

Again Thoth shuddered and an ashen hue tinged his dusky skin.

"Men knew me not in Aquilonia," he said. "But should my enemies in Stygia learn my whereabouts, not the width of half a world between us would suffice to save me from such a doom as would blast the soul of a bronze statue. Only a king with castles and hosts of swordsmen could protect me. So I have told you my secret, and urge that you make a pact with me. I can aid you with my wisdom, and you can protect me. And some day I will find the Ring——"

"Ring? Ring?" Thoth had underestimated the man's utter egoism. Dion had not even been listening to the slave's words, so completely engrossed was he in his own thoughts, but the final word stirred a ripple in his self-centeredness.

"Ring?" he repeated. "That makes me remember—my ring of good fortune. I had it from a Shemitish thief who swore he stole it from a wizard far to the south, and that it would bring me luck. I paid him enough, Mitra knows. By the gods, I need all the luck I can have, what with Volmana and Ascalante dragging me into their bloody plots—I'll see to the ring."

Thoth sprang up, blood mounting darkly to his face, while his eyes flamed with the stunned fury of a man who suddenly realizes the full depths of a fool's swinish stupidity. Dion never heeded him. Lifting a secret lid in the marble seat, he fumbled for a moment among a heap of gewgaws of various kinds—barbaric charms, bits of bones, pieces of tawdry jewelry—luck-pieces and conjures which the man's superstitious nature had prompted him to collect.

"Ah, here it is!" He triumphantly lifted a ring of curious make. It was of

a metal like copper, and was made in the form of a scaled serpent, coiled in three loops, with its tail in its mouth. Its eyes were yellow gems which glittered balefully. Thoth-Amon cried out as if he had been struck, and Dion wheeled and gaped, his face suddenly bloodless. The slave's eyes were blazing, his mouth wide, his huge dusky hands outstretched like talons.

"The Ring! By Set! The Ring!" he shrieked. "My Ring — stolen from me——"

Steel glittered in the Stygian's hand and with a heave of his great dusky shoulders he drove the dagger into the baron's fat body. Dion's high thin squeal broke in a strangled gurgle and his whole flabby frame collapsed like melted butter. A fool to the end, he died in mad terror, not knowing why. Flinging aside the crumpled corpse, already forgetful of it, Thoth grasped the ring in both hands, his dark eyes blazing with a fearful avidness.

"My Ring!" he whispered in terrible exultation. "My power!"

How long he crouched over the baleful thing, motionless as a statue, drinking the evil aura of it into his dark soul, not even the Stygian knew. When he shook himself from his revery and drew back his mind from the nighted abysses where it had been questing, the moon was rising, casting long shadows across the smooth marble back of the garden-seat, at the foot of which sprawled the darker shadow which had been the lord of Attalus.

"No more, Ascalante, no more!" whispered the Stygian, and his eyes burned red as a vampire's in the gloom. Stooping, he cupped a handful of congealing blood from the sluggish pool in which his victim sprawled, and rubbed it in the copper serpent's eyes until the yellow sparks were covered by a crimson mask.

"Blind your eyes, mystic serpent," he chanted in a blood-freezing whisper. "Blind your eyes to the moonlight and open them on darker gulfs! What do you see, oh serpent of Set? Whom do you call from the gulfs of the Night? Whose shadow falls on the waning Light? Call him to me, oh serpent of Set!"

Stroking the scales with a peculiar circular motion of his fingers, a motion which always carried the fingers back to their starting-place, his voice sank still lower as he whispered dark names and grisly incantations forgotten the world over save in the grim hinterlands of dark Stygia, where monstrous shapes move in the dusk of the tombs.

There was a movement in the air about him, such a swirl as is made in water when some creature rises to the surface. A nameless, freezing wind blew on him briefly, as if from an opened Door. Thoth felt a presence at his back, but he did not look about. He kept his eyes fixed on the moonlit space of marble, on which a tenuous shadow hovered. As he continued his whispered incantations, this shadow grew in size and clarity, until it stood out distinct and horrific. Its outline was not unlike that of a gigantic baboon, but no such baboon ever walked the earth, not even in Stygia. Still Thoth did not look, but drawing from his girdle a sandal of his master—always carried in the dim hope that he might be able to put it to such use—he cast it behind him.

"Know it well, slave of the Ring!" he exclaimed. "Find him who wore it and destroy him! Look into his eyes and blast his soul, before you tear out his throat! Kill him! Aye," in a blind burst of passion, "and all with him!"

Etched on the moonlit wall Thoth saw the horror lower its misshapen head and take the scent like some hideous hound. Then the grisly head was thrown back

and the thing wheeled and was gone like a wind through the trees. The Stygian flung up his arms in maddened exultation, and his teeth and eyes gleamed in the moonlight.

A soldier on guard without the walls yelled in startled horror as a great loping black shadow with flaming eyes cleared the wall and swept by him with a swirling rush of wind. But it was gone so swiftly that the bewildered warrior was left wondering whether it had been a dream or a hallucination.

4

When the world was young and men were weak,
and the fiends of the night walked free,
I strove with Set by fire and steel and the
juice of the upas-tree;
Now that I sleep in the mount's black heart,
and the ages take their toll,
Forget ye him who fought with the Snake to
save the human soul?

ALONE in the great sleeping-chamber with its high golden dome King Conan slumbered and dreamed. Through swirling gray mists he heard a curious call, faint and far, and though he did not understand it, it seemed not within his power to ignore it. Sword in hand he went through the gray mist, as a man might walk through clouds, and the voice grew more distinct as he proceeded until he understood the word it spoke—it was his own name that was being called across the gulfs of Space or Time.

Now the mists grew lighter and he saw that he was in a great dark corridor that seemed to be cut in solid black stone. It was unlighted, but by some magic he could see plainly. The floor, ceiling and walls were highly polished and gleamed dully, and they were carved with the figures of ancient heroes and half-forgotten gods. He shuddered to see the vast shadowy outlines of the Nameless Old Ones, and he knew somehow that mortal feet had not traversed the corridor for centuries.

He came upon a wide star carved in the solid rock, and the sides of the shaft were adorned with esoteric symbols so ancient and horrific that King Conan's skin crawled. The steps were carven each with the abhorrent figure of the Old Serpent, Set, so that at each step he planted his heel on the head of the Snake, as it was intended from old times. But he was none the less at ease for all that.

But the voice called him on, and at last, in darkness that would have been impenetrable to his material eyes, he came into a strange crypt, and saw a vague white-bearded figure sitting on a tomb. Conan's hair rose up and he grasped his sword, but the figure spoke in sepulchral tones.

"Oh man, do you know me?"

"Not I, by Crom!" swore the king.

"Man," said the ancient, "I am Epemitreus."

"But Epemitreus the Sage has been dead for fifteen hundred years!" stammered Conan.

"Harken!" spoke the other commandingly. "As a pebble cast into a dark lake sends ripples to the further shores, happenings in the Unseen World have broken like waves on my slumber. I have marked you well, Conan of Cimmeria, and the stamp of mighty happenings and great deeds is upon you. But dooms are loose in the land, against which your sword can not aid you."

"You speak in riddles," said Conan uneasily. "Let me see my foe and I'll cleave his skull to the teeth."

"Loose your barbarian fury against your foes of flesh and blood," answered the ancient. "It is not against men I must shield you. There are dark worlds barely guessed by man, wherein formless monsters stalk—fiends which may be drawn

from the Outer Voids to take material shape and rend and devour at the bidding of evil magicians. There is a serpent in your house, oh king—an adder in your kingdom, come up from Stygia, with the dark wisdom of the shadows in his murky soul. As a sleeping man dreams of the serpent which crawls near him, I have felt the foul presence of Set's neophyte. He is drunk with terrible power, and the blows he strikes at his enemy may well bring down the kingdom. I have called you to me, to give you a weapon against him and his hell-hound pack."

"But why?" bewilderedly asked Conan. "Men say you sleep in the black heart of Golamira, whence you send forth your ghost on unseen wings to aid Aquilonia in times of need, but I—I am an outlander and a barbarian."

"Peace!" the ghostly tones reverberated through the great shadowy cavern. "Your destiny is one with Aquilonia. Gigantic happenings are forming in the web and the womb of Fate, and a blood-mad sorcerer shall not stand in the path of imperial destiny. Ages ago Set coiled about the world like a python about its prey. All my life, which was as the lives of three common men, I fought him. I drove him into the shadows of the mysterious south, but in dark Stygia men still worship him who to us is the arch-demon. As I fought Set, I fight his worshippers and his votaries and his acolytes. Hold out your sword."

Wondering, Conan did so, and on the great blade, close to the heavy silver guard, the ancient traced with a bony finger a strange symbol that glowed like white fire in the shadows. And on the instant crypt, tomb and ancient vanished, and Conan, bewildered, sprang from his couch in the great golden-domed chamber. And as he stood, bewildered at the strangeness of his dream, he realized that he was gripping his sword in his hand. And his hair prickled at the nape of his neck, for on the broad blade was carven a symbol—the outline of a phœnix. And he remembered that on the tomb in the crypt he had seen what he had thought to be a similar figure, carven of stone. Now he wondered if it had been but a stone figure, and his skin crawled at the strangeness of it all.

Then as he stood, a stealthy sound in the corridor outside brought him to life, and without stopping to investigate, he began to don his armor; again he was the barbarian, suspicious and alert as a gray wolf at bay.

5

What do I know of cultured ways, the gilt, the craft and the lie?
I, who was born in a naked land and bred in the open sky.
The subtle tongue, the sophist guile, they fail when the broadswords sing;
Rush in and die, dogs—I was a man before I was a king.

—*The Road of Kings.*

THROUGH the silence which shrouded the corridor of the royal palace stole twenty furtive figures. Their stealthy feet, bare or cased in soft leather, made no sound either on thick carpet or bare marble tile. The torches which stood in niches along the halls gleamed red on dagger, sword and keen-edged ax.

"Easy all!" hissed Ascalante. "Stop that cursed loud breathing, whoever it is! The officer of the night-guard has removed most of the sentries from these halls and made the rest drunk, but we must be careful, just the same. Back! Here come the guard!"

They crowded back behind a cluster of carven pillars, and almost immediately ten giants in black armor swung by at a measured pace. Their faces showed doubt as they glanced at the officer who was leading them away from their post of

duty. This officer was rather pale; as the guard passed the hiding-places of the conspirators, he was seen to wipe the sweat from his brow with a shaky hand. He was young, and this betrayal of a king did not come easy to him. He mentally cursed the vain-glorious extravagance which had put him in debt to the money-lenders and made him a pawn of scheming politicians.

The guardsmen clanked by and disappeared up the corridor.

"Good!" grinned Ascalante. "Conan sleeps unguarded. Haste! If they catch us killing him, we're undone—but few men will espouse the cause of a dead king."

"Aye, haste!" cried Rinaldo, his blue eyes matching the gleam of the sword he swung above his head. "My blade is thirsty! I hear the gathering of the vultures! On!"

They hurried down the corridor with reckless speed and stopped before a gilded door which bore the royal dragon symbol of Aquilonia.

"Gromel!" snapped Ascalante. "Break me this door open!"

The giant drew a deep breath and launched his mighty frame against the panels, which groaned and bent at the impact. Again he crouched and plunged. With a snapping of bolts and a rending crash of wood, the door splintered and burst inward.

"In!" roared Ascalante, on fire with the spirit of the deed.

"In!" yelled Rinaldo. "Death to the tyrant!"

They stopped short. Conan faced them, not a naked man roused mazed and unarmed out of deep sleep to be butchered like a sheep, but a barbarian wide-awake and at bay, partly armored, and with his long sword in his hand.

For an instant the tableau held—the four rebel noblemen in the broken door, and the horde of wild hairy faces crowding behind them—all held momentarily frozen by the sight of the blazing-eyed giant standing sword in hand in the middle of the candle-lighted chamber. In that instant Ascalante beheld, on a small table near the royal couch, the silver scepter and the slender gold circlet which was the crown of Aquilonia, and the sight maddened him with desire.

"In, rogues!" yelled the outlaw. "He is one to twenty and he has no helmet!"

True; there had been lack of time to don the heavy plumed casque, or to lace in place the side-plates of the cuirass, nor was there now time to snatch the great shield from the wall. Still, Conan was better protected than any of his foes except Volmana and Gromel, who were in full armor.

The king glared, puzzled as to their identity. Ascalante he did not know; he could not see through the closed vizors of the armored conspirators, and Rinaldo had pulled his slouch cap down above his eyes. But there was no time for surmise. With a yell that rang to the roof, the killers flooded into the room, Gromel first. He came like a charging bull, head down, sword low for the disembowelling thrust. Conan sprang to meet him, and all his tigerish strength went into the arm that swung the sword. In a whistling arc the great blade flashed through the air and crashed on the Bossonian's helmet. Blade and casque shivered together and Gromel rolled lifeless on the floor. Conan bounded back, still gripping the broken hilt.

"Gromel!" he spat, his eyes blazing in amazement, as the shattered helmet disclosed the shattered head; then the rest of the pack were upon him. A dagger point raked along his ribs between breastplate

and backplate, a sword-edge flashed before his eyes. He flung aside the dagger-wielder with his left arm, and smashed his broken hilt like a cestus into the swordsman's temple. The man's brains spattered in his face.

"Watch the door, five of you!" screamed Ascalante, dancing about the edge of the singing steel whirlpool, for he feared that Conan might smash through their midst and escape. The rogues drew back momentarily, as their leader seized several and thrust them toward the single door, and in that brief respite Conan leaped to the wall and tore therefrom an ancient battle-ax which, untouched by time, had hung there for half a century.

With his back to the wall he faced the closing ring for a flashing instant, then leaped into the thick of them. He was no defensive fighter; even in the teeth of overwhelming odds he always carried the war to the enemy. Any other man would have already died there, and Conan himself did not hope to survive, but he did ferociously wish to inflict as much damage as he could before he fell. His barbaric soul was ablaze, and the chants of old heroes were singing in his ears.

As he sprang from the wall his ax dropped an outlaw with a severed shoulder, and the terrible back-hand return crushed the skull of another. Swords whined venomously about him, but death passed him by breathless margins. The Cimmerian moved in a blur of blinding speed. He was like a tiger among baboons as he leaped, side-stepped and spun, offering an ever-moving target, while his ax wove a shining wheel of death about him.

For a brief space the assassins crowded him fiercely, raining blows blindly and hampered by their own numbers; then they gave back suddenly—two corpses on the floor gave mute evidence of the king's fury, though Conan himself was bleeding from wounds on arm, neck and legs.

"Knaves!" screamed Rinaldo, dashing off his feathered cap, his wild eyes glaring. "Do ye shrink from the combat? Shall the despot live? Out on it!"

He rushed in, hacking madly, but Conan, recognizing him, shattered his sword with a short terrific chop and with a powerful push of his open hand sent him reeling to the floor. The king took Ascalante's point in his left arm, and the outlaw barely saved his life by ducking and springing backward from the swinging ax. Again the wolves swirled in and Conan's ax sang and crushed. A hairy rascal stooped beneath its stroke and dived at the king's legs, but after wrestling for a brief instant at what seemed a solid iron tower, glanced up in time to see the ax falling, but not in time to avoid it. In the interim one of his comrades lifted a broadsword with both hands and hewed through the king's left shoulder-plate, wounding the shoulder beneath. In an instant Conan's cuirass was full of blood.

Volmana, flinging the attackers right and left in his savage impatience, came plowing through and hacked murderously at Conan's unprotected head. The king ducked deeply and the sword shaved off a lock of his black hair as it whistled above him. Conan pivoted on his heel and struck in from the side. The ax crunched through the steel cuirass and Volmana crumpled with his whole left side caved in.

"Volmana!" gasped Conan breathlessly. "I'll know that dwarf in Hell——"

He straightened to meet the maddened rush of Rinaldo, who charged in wild and wide open, armed only with a dagger. Conan leaped back, lifting his ax.

"Rinaldo!" his voice was strident with desperate urgency. "Back! I would not slay you——"

"Die, tyrant!" screamed the mad minstrel, hurling himself headlong on the king. Conan delayed the blow he was loth to deliver, until it was too late. Only when he felt the bite of the steel in his unprotected side did he strike, in a frenzy of blind desperation.

Rinaldo dropped with his skull shattered, and Conan reeled back against the wall, blood spurting from between the fingers which gripped his wound.

"In, now, and slay him!" yelled Ascalante.

Conan put his back against the wall and lifted his ax. He stood like an image of the unconquerable primordial—legs braced far apart, head thrust forward, one hand clutching the wall for support, the other gripping the ax on high, with the great corded muscles standing out in iron ridges, and his features frozen in a death snarl of fury—his eyes blazing terribly through the mist of blood which veiled them. The men faltered—wild, criminal and dissolute though they were, yet they came of a breed men called civilized, with a civilized background; here was the barbarian — the natural killer. They shrank back—the dying tiger could still deal death.

Conan sensed their uncertainty and grinned mirthlessly and ferociously.

"Who dies first?" he mumbled through smashed and bloody lips.

Ascalante leaped like a wolf, halted almost in midair with incredible quickness and fell prostrate to avoid the death which was hissing toward him. He frantically whirled his feet out of the way and rolled clear as Conan recovered from his missed blow and struck again. This time the ax sank inches deep into the polished floor close to Ascalante's revolving legs.

Another misguided desperado chose this instant to charge, followed half-heartedly by his fellows. He intended killing Conan before the Cimmerian could wrench his ax from the floor, but his judgment was faulty. The red ax lurched up and crashed down and a crimson caricature of a man catapulted back against the legs of the attackers.

AT THAT instant a fearful scream burst from the rogues at the door as a black misshapen shadow fell across the wall. All but Ascalante wheeled at that cry, and then, howling like dogs, they burst blindly through the door in a raving, blaspheming mob, and scattered through the corridors in screaming flight.

Ascalante did not look toward the door; he had eyes only for the wounded king. He supposed that the noise of the fray had at last roused the palace, and that the loyal guards were upon him, though even in that moment it seemed strange that his hardened rogues should scream so terribly in their flight. Conan did not look toward the door because he was watching the outlaw with the burning eyes of a dying wolf. In this extremity Ascalante's cynical philosophy did not desert him.

"All seems to be lost, particularly honor," he murmured. "However, the king is dying on his feet—and——" Whatever other cogitation might have passed through his mind is not to be known; for, leaving the sentence uncompleted, he ran lightly at Conan just as the Cimmerian was perforce employing his ax-arm to wipe the blood from his blinded eyes.

But even as he began his charge, there was a strange rushing in the air and a heavy weight struck terrifically between

his shoulders. He was dashed headlong and great talons sank agonizingly in his flesh. Writhing desperately beneath his attacker, he twisted his head about and stared into the face of Nightmare and lunacy. Upon him crouched a great black thing which he knew was born in no sane or human world. Its slavering black fangs were near his throat and the glare of its yellow eyes shrivelled his limbs as a killing wind shrivels young corn.

The hideousness of its face transcended mere bestiality. It might have been the face of an ancient, evil mummy, quickened with demoniac life. In those abhorrent features the outlaw's dilated eyes seemed to see, like a shadow in the madness that enveloped him, a faint and terrible resemblance to the slave Thoth-Amon. Then Ascalante's cynical and all-sufficient philosophy deserted him, and with a ghastly cry he gave up the ghost before those slavering fangs touched him.

Conan, shaking the blood-drops from his eyes, stared frozen. At first he thought it was a great black hound which stood above Ascalante's distorted body; then as his sight cleared he saw that it was neither a hound nor a baboon.

With a cry that was like an echo of Ascalante's death-shriek, he reeled away from the wall and met the leaping horror with a cast of his ax that had behind it all the desperate power of his electrified nerves. The flying weapon glanced singing from the slanting skull it should have crushed, and the king was hurled halfway across the chamber by the impact of the giant body.

The slavering jaws closed on the arm Conan flung up to guard his throat, but the monster made no effort to secure a death-grip. Over his mangled arm it glared fiendishly into the king's eyes, in which there began to be mirrored a likeness of the horror which stared from the dead eyes of Ascalante. Conan felt his soul shrivel and begin to be drawn out of his body, to drown in the yellow wells of cosmic horror which glimmered spectrally in the formless chaos that was growing about him and engulfing all life and sanity. Those eyes grew and became gigantic, and in them the Cimmerian glimpsed the reality of all the abysmal and blasphemous horrors that lurk in the outer darkness of formless voids and nighted gulfs. He opened his bloody lips to shriek his hate and loathing, but only a dry rattle burst from his throat.

But the horror that paralyzed and destroyed Ascalante roused in the Cimmerian a frenzied fury akin to madness. With a volcanic wrench of his whole body he plunged backward, heedless of the agony of his torn arm, dragging the monster bodily with him. And his outflung hand struck something his dazed fighting-brain recognized as the hilt of his broken sword. Instinctively he gripped it and struck with all the power of nerve and thew, as a man stabs with a dagger. The broken blade sank deep and Conan's arm was released as the abhorrent mouth gaped as in agony. The king was hurled violently aside, and lifting himself on one hand he saw, as one mazed, the terrible convulsions of the monster from which thick blood was gushing through the great wound his broken blade had torn. And as he watched, its struggles ceased and it lay jerking spasmodically, staring upward with its grisly dead eyes. Conan blinked and shook the blood from his own eyes; it seemed to him that the thing was melting and disintegrating into a slimy unstable mass.

Then a medley of voices reached his ears, and the room was thronged with the finally roused people of the court—knights, peers, ladies, men-at-arms, coun-

cillors—all babbling and shouting and getting in one another's way. The Black Dragons were on hand, wild with rage, swearing and ruffling, with their hands on their hilts and foreign oaths in their teeth. Of the young officer of the doorguard nothing was seen, nor was he found then or later, though earnestly sought after.

"GROMEL! Volmana! Rinaldo!" exclaimed Publius, the high councillor, wringing his fat hands among the corpses. "Black treachery! Some one shall dance for this! Call the guard."

"The guard is here, you old fool!" cavalierly snapped Pallantides, commander of the Black Dragons, forgetting Publius' rank in the stress of the moment. "Best stop your caterwauling and aid us to bind the king's wounds. He's like to bleed to death."

"Yes, yes!" cried Publius, who was a man of plans rather than action. "We must bind his wounds. Send for every leech of the court! Oh, my lord, what a black shame on the city! Are you entirely slain?"

"Wine!" gasped the king from the couch where they had laid him. They put a goblet to his bloody lips and he drank like a man half dead of thirst.

"Good!" he grunted, falling back. "Slaying is cursed dry work."

They had stanched the flow of blood, and the innate vitality of the barbarian was asserting itself.

"See first to the dagger-wound in my side," he bade the court physicians. "Rinaldo wrote me a deathly song there, and keen was the stylus."

"We should have hanged him long ago," gibbered Publius. "No good can come of poets—who is this?"

He nervously touched Ascalante's body with his sandalled toe.

"By Mitra!" ejaculated the commander. "It is Ascalante, once count of Thune! What devil's work brought *him* up from his desert haunts?"

"But why does he stare so?" whispered Publius, drawing away, his own eyes wide and a peculiar prickling among the short hairs at the back of his fat neck. The others fell silent as they gazed at the dead outlaw.

"Had you seen what he and I saw," growled the king, sitting up despite the protests of the leeches, "you had not wondered. Blast your own gaze by looking at——" He stopped short, his mouth gaping, his finger pointing fruitlessly. Where the monster had died, only the bare floor met his eyes.

"Crom!" he swore. "The thing's melted back into the foulness which bore it!"

"The king is delirious," whispered a noble. Conan heard and swore with barbaric oaths.

"By Badb, Morrigan, Macha and Nemain!" he concluded wrathfully. "I am sane! It was like a cross between a Stygian mummy and a baboon. It came through the door, and Ascalante's rogues fled before it. It slew Ascalante, who was about to run me through. Then it came upon me and I slew it—how I know not, for my ax glanced from it as from a rock. But I think that the Sage Epemitreus had a hand in it——"

"Hark how he names Epemitreus, dead for fifteen hundred years!" they whispered to each other.

"By Ymir!" thundered the king. "This night I talked with Epemitreus! He called to me in my dreams, and I walked down a black stone corridor carved with old gods, to a stone stair on the steps of which were the outlines of Set, until I came to a crypt, and a tomb with a phœnix carved on it——"

"In Mitra's name, lord king, be silent!" It was the high-priest of Mitra who cried out, and his countenance was ashen.

Conan threw up his head like a lion tossing back its mane, and his voice was thick with the growl of the angry lion.

"Am I a slave, to shut my mouth at your command?"

"Nay, nay, my lord!" The high-priest was trembling, but not through fear of the royal wrath. "I meant no offense." He bent his head close to the king and spoke in a whisper that carried only to Conan's ears.

"My lord, this is a matter beyond human understanding. Only the inner circle of the priestcraft know of the black stone corridor carved in the black heart of Mount Golamira, by unknown hands, or of the phœnix-guarded tomb where Epemitreus was laid to rest fifteen hundred years ago. And since that time no living man has entered it, for his chosen priests, after placing the Sage in the crypt, blocked up the outer entrance of the corridor so that no man could find it, and today not even the high-priests know where it is. Only by word of mouth, handed down by the high-priests to the chosen few, and jealously guarded, does the inner circle of Mitra's acolytes know of the resting-place of Epemitreus in the black heart of Golamira. It is one of the Mysteries, on which Mitra's cult stands."

"I can not say by what magic Epemitreus brought me to him," answered Conan. "But I talked with him, and he made a mark on my sword. Why that mark made it deadly to demons, or what magic lay behind the mark, I know not; but though the blade broke on Gromel's helmet, yet the fragment was long enough to kill the horror."

"Let me see your sword," whispered the high-priest from a throat gone suddenly dry.

Conan held out the broken weapon and the high-priest cried out and fell to his knees.

"Mitra guard us against the powers of darkness!" he gasped. "The king has indeed talked with Epemitreus this night! There on the sword—it is the secret sign none might make but him—the emblem of the immortal phœnix which broods for ever over his tomb! A candle, quick! Look again at the spot where the king said the goblin died!"

It lay in the shade of a broken screen. They threw the screen aside and bathed the floor in a flood of candle-light. And a shuddering silence fell over the people as they looked. Then some fell on their knees calling on Mitra, and some fled screaming from the chamber.

There on the floor where the monster had died, there lay, like a tangible shadow, a broad dark stain that could not be washed out; the thing had left its outline clearly etched in its blood, and that outline was of no being of a sane and normal world. Grim and horrific it brooded there, like the shadow cast by one of the apish gods that squat on the shadowy altars of dim temples in the dark land of Stygia.

"Stooping to the coffin, he lifted the slender body in his arms."

The Quick and the Dead

By VINCENT STARRETT

An ironic yet intensely human story of a grief-stricken poet, and a body that moved in its coffin

LOOKING with melancholy satisfaction upon his reflected image in the glass, Louis Lacenaire completely realized that seldom had he appeared to greater advantage. As for the last time he imperceptibly adjusted the knot of his gray silk cravat, with its single line of horizontal black, he thought with a pang how happy his dear Louise would have been to see him as he looked upon this morning of her funeral. Then with a little sigh he turned to the door and ran lightly down the stairs.

At the cemetery, as the clods of earth thudded with solemn import upon the coffin, he grasped the arm of his companion and whispered, "I can not bear it!"

"I know, I know," murmured Hypolite Allard, and together they left the burying-ground.

The sun shone brilliantly above the

roofs of Paris in the distance; in the suburbs the dust of puffballs filled the air. But sadly the two friends trod the pavements, thinking of her whom they had left behind. Incomparable Louise!

"My dear friend, how you must suffer!" said Hypolite Allard. "My heart bleeds with your own. She was so exquisite and dear."

"There was none like her in the world," cried Lacenaire, despairingly. "I could not stay until the end, Hypolite. You do not blame me?"

"Blame you, my dear Louis? I marvel at the restraint that held you until it did."

The bereaved lover pressed his companion's arm. "For a time I was dazed," he explained. "I experienced that dim sensation of looking on, disembodied—you understand?—at what had gone beyond my power to suffer. Then, suddenly, something snapped within me; it seemed that a veil was snatched from my eyes, so that I saw clearly the desecration that was going forward. That lovely body that was being laid away in the earth! Those dreadful clods! You understand?"

"Perfectly, my friend. It was indeed terrible. Those clods fell also upon my own heart. They were like the beats of a dreadful drum. But you must not distress yourself too greatly or too long. It is not fair to yourself, Louis. I grieve to see you so broken by this sorrow. And there is still your work!"

"My work!" gestured the poet. "It will never be the same," he added with determined pessimism. "It was for her I wrote my finest sonnets. Her inspiration was in my greatest lines. *'The monster Death that cuckolds lovers all!'* You remember, Hypolite, how happy I was the day I wrote that final line? How could I know that it was prophetic! Yesterday, Hypolite, I went to her rooms. The dear little Claire was still there, in charge; yet everything was different. The furniture seemed to have been moved about; I felt that I was in a different place. It was like an apartment arranged for guests. You know? The little Claire was kind and sympathetic, but my dear Louise was gone. I knew that she would never be there again."

His companion nodded. "I know the emotion," he said. "I felt it once in my own place. It had been changed about for an amateur rehearsal. Dubronet was there. You remember him? He had been cast as a musketeer. He looked like a wax-works D'Artagnan. Marie was mad about him. But the little Claire is always kind and sympathetic. How she, too, must miss our dear Louise!"

"She was so exquisitely simple in her white frock," said Lacenaire. "She had refused to go into mourning. Louise would not have liked it, she said; and it was true. There were tears in her eyes as she embraced me. Her sympathy was very comforting."

"She is very sweet and good," agreed Hypolite Allard, understandingly. "May it not be, Louis, that through her association with your Louise, she is the one to ease the wound that you have suffered?"

But Louis Lacenaire smiled wanly and shook his head.

"It can never be assuaged," he answered bravely. "It was an affectionate thought, Hypolite, my friend, but do not think of it again, I beg of you. There can never be another to take the place that Louise has left vacant."

"I understand," said Hypolite Allard, as again he pressed his friend's arms. "It shall be as you say. Yet I should be happy to say something to cheer you, were it possible. But look, Louis, to the left—between the treetops—where the little window looks out beneath the ga-

bles, framed in vines. It is a picture for an artist. There is the very essence of romance in such vignettes. Do you not feel it? What may not those bordering vines conceal from us? A face piquant and charming perhaps, smiling an invitation. One looks to see a white arm extended, and slender fingers that gently sway a kerchief or a scarf."

For an instant the poet turned and gazed, then shrugged without emotion.

"A pretty fancy, Hypolite," he conceded, "but you are wrong. Were we to approach more closely, doubtless we should see the charming creature who dwells behind your vines. I can describe her for you without a glance. She is fat and horrible, with hair like the bristles of a pig. Her teeth protrude, and her ankles are so thick that they might be mistaken for the arms of trees. Do not waste your talents upon the country, my friend. The white arms and slender fingers have long ago fled to the apartments of the city."

He sighed deeply and, swinging his cane, resumed his sober stride.

A BRIGHT-EYED dog, diminutive and shaggy, ran out of a gateway as they paused, and approached squirming happily in obedience to the poet's finger-snap. "Good fellow," said Lacenaire, with reckless disregard of the animal's sex. He stooped to fondle its head, while the ecstatic puppy wagged joyously everything behind its ears. "What sorrows would you have to tell us, little dog, if you could talk? See, Hypolite, how happy a little kindness makes him. It is so with us, too. Ah, how much trouble is caused by hardening of the heart!"

"And by softening of the brain," added Allard, pulling the puppy's ears. "Have you heard, Louis, of Chinette's latest madness? She has had her dog's ears pierced for ear-rings. There, there, what a nice puppy it is!"

"Atrocious!" said the poet, rising to his feet to dust his knees. "Louise was kindness itself to animals. I do not yet fully appreciate what I have lost. There can never be another like her."

"Never!" agreed Hypolite Allard. "For *you*, Louis, she was the perfect woman. She was unique. Had it not been for your wife——"

"I should have *married* her!" declared Lacenaire with conviction. "We were intended for each other. Yes, even marriage with her would have been sweet and tender. Of how many women can that be said, Hypolite?"

"Few indeed," sighed Hypolite Allard. "It is as you say, Louis. She was a paragon of women. But see, we approach the city. I trust that we are to lunch together?"

The poet paused and laid his hands upon the shoulders of his friend, so that they looked deeply into each other's eyes. "No, my friend," he said. "I thank you, but for a time I feel that I must be alone. You will not misunderstand? I have much to think about. Indeed, I do not feel that I could eat. There is something abhorrent to me in the thought of food. Leave me, dear friend, now that we have reached the Boulevard. Enjoy your own luncheon greatly, without me. I shall see you again. I am just going to walk and walk and walk, thinking always of my dear Louise."

"I understand," said Hypolite Allard, answering his friend's affectionate pressure. Smiling, he added: "Be careful, Louis, that your walk does not take you toward home! The little ones might recognize you."

"Villain!" smiled Louis Lacenaire. "To remind me of that! But do not fear. I have not been home since Louise was taken from me. I am thought to be walking, near Tours."

"Farewell, then, old fellow, and take care of yourself. I shall worry until I see you again."

"Farewell, Hypolite," said the poet sadly. "Do not worry. If I am for ever bereaved, I am at least no coward. I shall do nothing terrible and final. We shall meet again. God bless you, my friend!"

They embraced and parted. Somewhere a clock struck twelve. The heat of the sun had become oppressive. A taxicab rattled by, bound for the city. Both turned and looked after it wistfully. Then both waved determined farewells.

As his stride lengthened, Allard drew a long breath. "Poor Louis!" he muttered. "I am afraid this has hit him pretty hard. It is a loss, of course. Such a mistress as Louise is not to be found in every street. But he is too overwhelmed. It is not good to become so attached to a woman. Ah, these faithful lovers! I should have thought that little Claire——"

He sighed profoundly and decided that the wine was better at Pepin's.

But to Lacenaire it seemed that the dark ages had returned, and that he was groping through them with a tallow candle. Nothing now could avail to comfort him. Well, there was, of course, his work, as Allard had pointed out. That, at least, was a debt he owed to the world, and it would be paid. But it could not minimize nor dull his anguish. Louise, Louise! Critics now would note the change that had occurred in his verse. He would sing his sorrow like another Dante to another Beatrice, like another Petrarch to another Laura. No lady had been lovelier than his. He would sit down in the waters of calamity and smile bravely at fate. In all the world there was no woman left for him; but never would the world forget the woman he had loved and who had died.

He strolled aimlessly onward toward the bustle of the city. And suddenly he realized that he was hungry. It was a shocking situation. It was almost a betrayal of Louise. He supposed, however, that even bereaved lovers could not deny the functions of nature. The single taxicab that had passed him seemed to have been the last of its race. A pretty milliner's apprentice, noting the restless eyes and pale face, presented her admirable teeth for his inspection. He smiled sorrowfully, pityingly, and passed on. Other persons began to pass him, singly and in pairs. Then there were knots, and at length the throngs of the city engulfed him. Attracted by his immaculate image in the shop windows that he passed, he stopped at length and examined his features in the dim mirror that offered. Yes, he was suffering; there was no doubt about it. He was suffering the torments of the unshriven. His appearance was more than haggard; it was tragic. Louise, Louise!

UNDER the trees of Montmartre he encountered a small and attractive restaurant, with the tables set outdoors. He captured an advantageous chair and called for the bill of fare and pen and ink. While he waited, he looked upward at the sky. It was very blue, blue as a blue butterfly. Like a butterfly, it swam in and out among the roofs and chimneys. The streets swam in the sun. And yet Louise was dead. His little sweetheart was dead. What suffering! And yet—had not her death enriched him? And, if this were true, what matter how he suffered?

The bill of fare, when it arrived, had been reduced by expunging pencil marks to a few dishes, rendered doubly uninviting by this distinction of survival, but he ordered recklessly and managed to consume what was set before him without discomfort. An idea for a sonnet was

growing in his mind. . . . When we are told that we are loved for our bodies, and not for our minds, he thought, we need no consolation, for we are delighted. We feel that we are loved for ourselves. But when we are told that we are loved for our minds, we are hurt, for we understand that we are loved for something that is extrinsic and, in the last analysis, of trivial merit.

As he placed the point of his pen against the paper, a girl passed the café who looked so much like the little Claire that he was startled. But Claire was miles away. She had distinctly told him that she would not attend the funeral. She did not like funerals, and she preferred to remember his dear Louise as she had known her in life. What happy chance was this that had brought the little Claire to him when he was most in need of comfort?

Hastily paying his bill, he stuffed the unwritten sonnet into his pocket and sallied forth. A rapid walk of half a block, however, convinced him of his mistake. The little blond creature was not Claire at all, but merely a charming child who resembled Claire. A delightful, fairy-like little trick, as sweet and pure as his own Louise. She carried a package under her arm, and no doubt had been out upon an errand. Probably she lived in the neighborhood, not far away. Her voice, he imagined, was like the chime of a silver bell: Louise's very voice. Dear child, she was herself a poem, stirring more hearts by her beauty than ever faltered at a sonnet.

But what was this? A tall ruffian was sauntering close behind her. Perhaps she was in danger of insult. He was an evil-looking scoundrel with his lopsided smile. Disguised as a porter, he was undoubtedly a villain of the deepest dye.

"I shall follow her a little way," murmured Lacenaire, sympathetically. "She may never know that she has been protected; but if she should have need of help, it will be well that I should be on hand."

He timed his own saunter to the stride of the desperado who looked like a porter, and with relief saw him turn off at the next thoroughfare. The little maid continued straight ahead, without a glance. It was Lacenaire's own way, as it happened. Straight ahead is ever the brave way when one is in doubt. He strolled quietly along some yards behind, pleased by the extraordinary chance that had thrown so perfect a poem into his path upon a day so fraught with gloom. The turn of her ankle was exquisite and the carriage of her dainty head was pert and charming. Her scrubby little jacket and unevenly hung skirt might have clothed a princess; her hat was such a hat as a happy woman might wear.

Once as she paused and for some purpose removed one of her gloves, the poet noted, as often he had noted before, the ravishing effect of white hands coming swiftly out of black swathings. Not wishing to frighten her by his proximity, he paused also at the moment, and gravely adjusted his cuffs before a tobacconist's doorstep.

Apparently she lived in the Rue Robert, which would be astounding. Dubronet, himself, none other, lived in the Rue Robert. Allard had even mentioned the man upon the walk from the cemetery. An amazing coincidence. It might even be that she lived in Dubronet's own building. How laughable if she should prove to be his sister! Yes, she was indeed turning into the Rue Robert.

To Lacenaire it seemed that all the taxicabs of Paris contrived to be present at that moment, and to rush at him from every direction as he attempted

to cross the street. A short time ago there had been none; he had looked for one in vain. Now they came in families! One red one he sidestepped by an inch. The little maid was safely across. She was vanishing.

"You abominable insect!" said Lacenaire, furiously. "You insufferable toad!"

Claiming to have information about the poet's mother, the driver cast it impartially abroad. His words were numerous and bitter.

"You indescribable blue noun!" screamed Lacenaire from the curb. "If only I had time to destroy you!"

But already too much time had been wasted. For just an instant the little maid had been clearly in his vision, and in the next she had vanished. Just a flirt of the adorable ankle as she had entered a doorway; then nothing.

"And yet," fumed Lacenaire, countermarching in the street, "it must have been one of two. It is certainly either No. 18 or No. 20. . . . Dubronet is at 22. Could it have been No. 22?"

Well, well, the little maid was now safely within doors, and after all what difference did it make? She was at home, now, and happy, as was right and proper. Now that Louise was gone, what dwelling could be home to the poet Lacenaire? This child and Dubronet were mere neighbors, of course. Perhaps they had never seen each other. That was often the way of things in the city.

"At any rate," said the poet Lacenaire, aloud, "now that I am here I shall look in on Dubronet. It is too bad that we have never exchanged visits. He is an excellent fellow. Allard is prejudiced because of Marie."

Dubronet, he reflected, had been married three times, and in other respects had proved himself no mere spectator of life. He would be able to sympathize with his friend's loss. It might perhaps be unwise to mention the little maid in the neighboring building; there was no necessity for placing her in peril of Dubronet's gallantries, which were well known. It was possible, of course, that Dubronet would himself speak of her.

"I have a strange premonition of happiness," murmured Lacenaire, "of happiness touched with sorrow. It is rarely that one sees a child so innocent and happy, and yet so attractive. She interests me deeply. It is because she reminds me so much of my dear Louise. How odd that I should have mistaken her for little Claire! She is a great deal more like Louise. And yet, as I think of it, there was much in Claire and in Louise that was alike."

He entered the doorway of No. 22 and viewed with distaste the long dark stairway that stretched before him. Dubronet was up four floors, at least; perhaps five. A ridiculous precaution! With a sigh he began slowly to mount the stairs, but at the first landing he stopped to listen. There was some one coming down. Perhaps it was Dubronet himself. But no, there were several persons descending. They came slowly, and with a vast puffing and brushing of their bodies against the walls. Lacenaire strained his eyes upward in the gloom of the staircase, but the bend of the flight above intervened to obstruct his view. Annoyed, he waited on his landing until they were close at hand. Then, startled, he shrank back and stared.

Three men, bulking hugely in the dim light, were rounding the turn, carrying something heavy between them. It was a pine coffin. No need of its sinister size and shape to tell him that. He had sensed it at once. The foremost pair was

descending backward with heavy breathing.

What an encounter! Coming directly from the cemetery, where he had buried his beloved, to seek sympathy at the hands of a friend, now to be so rudely reminded of his loss on this dim stairway! Anger filled him, and a sense of injury. No other time could have been chosen for this removal; they must wait until he had entered the house unwitting. Some stupid laborer had died, and now he was to be buried.

"Steady there!" called the foremost carriers in unison, to the single toiler in the rear. "There is some one coming up. Get back or go past us, can't you?" added one of the men, peering sharply at the poet in the corner.

The cortège had stopped. The first pair had brushed by and the other man had yet to pass. The coffin lay immediately beneath the eyes of the bereaved lover.

"Go on, you idiots," he said indignantly. "Do you suppose I want to sit down on it?"

Then suddenly something stirred in the silence that caused his heart for a moment to become ice; a sound from within the coffin.

"My God!" said Lacenaire, in a hollow voice. "What have you there? It is moving!"

He sprang back as he spoke, his eyes fixed upon the box, ready for flight.

"It is a young girl," answered the spokesman, respectfully, not knowing with whom he had to deal. "She is dead of heart-failure. We are taking her to the undertaker's."

"A young girl!" cried Lacenaire, appalled. "But she is *not* dead! I heard her move—just now—inside the box!"

The man shrugged and took a firmer hold upon his burden. "Be sure that she is quite dead," he answered, good-humoredly. "Otherwise, we should not be taking her away. If you are her lover——"

"A young girl!" shrieked Lacenaire. "You dolts, I tell you I heard her move inside the coffin. I am not her lover, you fools! I do not know her. You are burying her alive!" Angrily he concluded: "Do you think I am crazy? I tell you she is not dead. I order you to take her back. Do you want me to call the police?"

Grumbling, the men began a retreat before this determination. "As you say, master," said the spokesman, "but it is funny that *we* heard nothing. She has been dead for hours. Since you insist, you shall see for yourself."

The procession, having reversed itself, moved slowly upward, with Lacenaire a few steps behind. Amazement and curiosity now had taken the place of indignation in his mind.

"Hurry, you snails," he ordered feverishly; and instantly asked, "What is her name? Where does she live? Where are her people?"

"Her name is Chardon," answered the man who had spoken. "She lives up another floor, where we found her. Her people, we were told, are dead. She died suddenly, this morning. A neighbor told us to come and take her away."

"Good God!" cried the poet, reverently. "That such things can happen! Was there no doctor called?"

"I am sorry, master, but I do not know," answered the carrier. "We were told that her furniture would pay for her burial."

"Her furniture!" sobbed Lacenaire. He bounded past them at the indicated number and flung open the door. It was a front room, and the gay sunlight of early afternoon fell outward across the sill to illumine the spectacle.

When the pine boards had been wrenched away, they looked down upon

the body of the girl who lay within the coffin. She was young and slender, and she was garbed as she had fallen, in a neat house-dress of black and yellow. Her face was thin and pale, and the eyes were closed. With a cry of grief, Lacenaire snatched a small mirror from the wall and bent down to hold it to her mouth.

"Why, she is beautiful!" he said, passing the glass across the too-red lips. "It is an old trick, and perhaps it will not work; but it is all I can think of."

But the mirror was unnecessary, for the girl was definitely stirring in her coffin, waking as if from a long sleep.

"You must get a doctor at once," ordered the poet, happily. "Run quickly, one of you, and bring back the nearest you can find. This girl is going to live!"

Stooping to the coffin, as the man hurried off, he lifted the slender body in his arms and carried it to a sofa. Then very gently he began to chafe the hands and feet, looking eagerly all the time upon the closed eyelids, awaiting the moment when they would open again. . . . Would they be brown or blue, he wondered; and what could be her name? She was adorable!

THE doctor, when with astonishing rapidity he had been located and convoyed to the scene, was more successful in his ministrations, and so it happened that when the eyes first opened it was upon his bearded lips that they gazed.

The physician was enthusiastic. "Fine! Fine!" he exclaimed, jubilantly, rubbing his hands together in an ecstasy. "One of the finest cases of arrested life that I have ever seen. My dear sir, I can not thank you heartily enough for this opportunity. This case will make my reputation."

"I am very glad to hear it," said Lacenaire, with a little bow and smile. "I am myself happy to have been an instrument in so agreeable and successful a resurrection."

"She should be grateful to us both," chuckled the physician, as he busied himself about the stove. "A few more minutes and she would have failed to return. She has no idea yet what has happened, but we shall give her some food, and then perhaps she will sleep for a time. I think the poor child must have been starving. When she wakes she must have more food, and something to drink. We must get somebody to stay with her—a nurse perhaps, since there is no family."

"Pardon," smiled Lacenaire, with a charming gesture, "but it is my intention to stay with her, myself. Should I need assistance, I have friends in the building who will be happy to render it; but I am very intelligent, and if you will tell me what is necessary, it will be sufficient."

"Her name," said the physician, "appears to be Heléne. It is here upon this sofa cover."

"A sweet name," said the poet. "It was my sister's name. She died of a very rare disease. It would have interested you. This child is very like her. How old would you guess her to be?"

"Not a day above nineteen."

"It was my sister's very age!"

"You must be kind to her, of course," said the physician. "With your permission, I shall look in again this evening."

"I shall be *more* than kind," promised Lacenaire, grasping the other's hand.

"Heléne," he murmured, standing beside the sofa when the doctor had gone away. "There is something in you, also, of Claire and of Louise. It is that which attracts me to you. You are adorable!"

"SHE is adorable, Hypolite," he told his friend Allard, when again they met. "You must wait until you see her, my friend. There is no one like her in the world!"

"The toad-men leaped and splashed through the marshy lowlands."

Buccaneers of Venus

By OTIS ADELBERT KLINE

A powerful weird-scientific story by a master of science-fiction—a swift-moving tale of piracy, and weird monsters on another planet

The Story Thus Far

ROBERT GRANDON, young Chicago clubman, who had fought his way to the throne of Reabon, mightiest empire of the planet Venus, was about to leave on his honeymoon with his beautiful young bride, Vernia, Princess of Reabon, when three other rulers, Ad of Tyrhana, Aardvan of Adonijar, and Zinlo of Olba, arrived in one of the latter's swift airships.

His visitors told him that Ad's daughter, Narine, had been captured by the Huitsenni, a marauding, buccaneering race of hairless yellow beings who constantly harassed the shipping and coastal cities of Venus, and whose hidden port, Huitsen, had never been discovered.

The four rulers then entered into a secret alliance against Huitsen, and Grandon and Vernia went on their interrupted honeymoon to the sea-coast.

Early the next morning, while Grandon was fishing, Vernia was carried off by the Huitsenni, and her guards were massacred. Grandon pursued the pirate fleet in a small sailing-vessel, accompanied by only one man, Kantar the Gunner, who was an expert with torks and mattorks, light and heavy Venusian machine-guns.

Under cover of darkness, Grandon and Kantar managed to board the enemy flag-

ship, on which Vernia had been carried off. They were captured and imprisoned, and in the meantime Vernia was abducted by San Thoy, a yellow pirate who had conceived a violent passion for her.

Grandon and Kantar managed to escape and follow them, using one of the buccaneers, whom they had taken prisoner, as a guide to the Island of the Valkars, or Toad People, where they were believed to have gone. As they neared the island, they crashed on a treacherous shoal, and went down into the swirling waters.

In the meantime Vernia had been landed on the island by San Thoy, and taken to a small cabin. The pirate protested that he only wished to save her from slavery, but became drunk on kova, a narcotic beverage, and revealed his true purpose—to claim her as his own.

Vernia ran from the cabin, with San Thoy in pursuit, and both were captured by the Valkars. The toad-men leaped and splashed through the marshy lowlands with their captives, and carried them to the toad village near the center of the island, where they were haled before Grunk, King of the Valkars.

Grunk had enslaved many of the Huitsenni buccaneers who had been captured by his warriors, but never before had they brought in a woman. He ordered that she be retained for the purpose of breeding a race of slaves, and gave her to Hui Sen, one of his favorites.

CHAPTER 6

A DECEPTIVE LIGHT

As GRANDON struggled in the seething water, he strove to look about him for some sign of Kantar the Gunner. But save for the phosphorescent luminescence ahead, which had lured them onto the rocks, all was blackness.

"Kantar!" he shouted. "Kantar! Where are you?"

A big roller caught him unawares. Part of it he inhaled. Strangling and choking, he endeavored to rid his tortured lungs of the smarting brine. All the time he was being carried swiftly toward that deceptive phosphorescence. The roar of the breakers grew deafening. He realized, then, that if Kantar had been within fifty feet of him when he shouted, he probably would not have heard his cry.

Presently his hands struck a sloping ledge of sharp coral. He drew himself up onto it, and stood erect. But a giant comber instantly knocked him flat, cutting his hands, face and body on the jagged coral. After that, he crawled forward painfully until the coral was replaced by rugged bits of stone, and finally by a sharply slanting beach where jointed, saw-edged reeds grew among outcroppings of volcanic rock. For some time he rested on a slab of water-worn lava, panting heavily from his exertions. His cuts and scratches were rendered doubly painful by the salt water.

Presently he stood up. The phosphorescent light was not more than five hundred feet away, and it seemed to be slowly moving toward him in a rather erratic fashion. It lit up the waving reeds and brackish pools with a pale greenish white luminescence. As he watched, it stopped behind a clump of tall reeds.

Suddenly, between himself and that light he saw a human form sloshing through the pools. There was something familiar about the bedraggled figure. He recognized the gunner.

"Kantar!" he shouted, running forward.

The figure splashed onward, unable to hear him because of the roar of the breakers. At a distance of a few feet he again shouted: "Kantar!" at the top of his voice.

The gunner turned.

"Majesty!" he exclaimed. "I had thought you drowned with that yellow chispa.* Praise Thorth, you are alive!"

"We must find that hut of the Huitsenni, quickly," said Grandon as he came up. "Have you any idea where to look for it?"

"Our guide said there would be a light," replied Kantar. "I was about to investigate this one."

"I saw it moving, a moment ago," said Grandon. "I doubt that the cabin would be built in a salt marsh, or that a light in it would move about as this one has. Perhaps it is a light carried by one of the creatures the pirates called 'Valkars.' But it will do no harm to investigate."

Cautiously they crept forward through the marsh, bending down below the level of the waving reeds so that they would not be seen. Presently Kantar laid a hand on Grandon's arm, and exclaimed: "I see it, Majesty! Why, it's an enorm worm!"

Looking through the place where the gunner had parted the reeds, the Earthman saw a fat, grub-like creature about five feet in length. Its entire body glowed with a greenish white light. Leisurely it moved among the reeds, browsing on the water plants that grew in the bottoms of the brackish pools.

Disturbed at its feeding by the sound, the creature reared its luminous head and spied them. Arching its neck, it gnashed its mandibles threateningly.

"I wonder if that thing would shine as brightly dead as alive," said Grandon. "If so, it would be useful to us."

For answer, Kantar elevated the muzzle of his tork, and pressing the firing-button, deftly sprayed a line of the needle-like projectiles across the luminous throat. Cut off as cleanly as if by a sword-blade in the hands of an expert, the head fell from the body, which immediately began writhing and thrashing about in the rushes and shallow water.

"Neatly done, Gunner," commented Grandon. "Why, the thing appears to be shining more than ever! Now for a couple of torches."

So saying, he whipped out his scarbo, and advancing to where the headless thing squirmed and floundered in the reeds, cut off two sections, each about a foot in length. Then, with two sharpened reeds which he thrust into the sections for handles, he made a pair of torches, each of which was capable of lighting up the terrain for at least fifty feet in every direction.

Grandon passed one torch to Kantar, and holding the other above his head, set off along the shore line in the hope of coming upon the cabin which their yellow prisoner had described, and where he believed they would find Vernia in the power of the unscrupulous San Thoy. But though they traveled as swiftly as the rugged character of the shore line would permit for the rest of the night, morning dawned without their having reached their objective.

With his scarbo, Grandon speared a large, spiny fish, left by the ebbing tide in a small pool. They cooked a portion of it over a fire of dry reeds ignited by Grandon's flame-maker. It was tough, bony, and rather tasteless, but a welcome meal, nevertheless, to the two hungry men.

As soon as they had breakfasted, they set off once more along the shore line. Shortly thereafter, the character of the terrain underwent a decided change. The ground sloped upward, and instead of a marsh behind them, there was now a

* A large hairless rodent of Venus. Equivalent to saying: "That yellow rat."

belt of fern-forest, while the flat beach gave way to rugged rock ledges, then towering cliffs, clothed to their very edges with tree-ferns, bush-ferns, and many creeping and climbing varieties, as well as a few species of cycads and other primitive types. Here there grew in abundance the large Zorovian water-ferns, the ribs of which contain water, clear, cold and sweet as any that may be found on Venus. They paused, and broke off enough fronds to assuage their thirst and fill their canteens. Then they pressed onward.

Soon they came, quite unexpectedly, upon a small natural harbor. The entrance was a narrow channel which zigzagged between tall cliffs, and the little inland bay, protected from wind and waves by this natural barrier, was as smooth as glass.

"This must be the cove described by our prisoner," said Grandon, excitedly. "The cabin should not be far off."

"I see it, Majesty," cried the sharp-eyed gunner, "over near the center of the bay. It's partly hidden by the tree-ferns."

"Sure enough! Come on."

Grandon led the way at so swift a pace now, that the tired gunner was sorely put to it to keep up with him. As they neared the cabin, the sight of the small boat which had been left there by San Thoy caused Grandon to hurry faster than ever, for he now felt positive that he should find Vernia and her captor in the cabin. But within less than a hundred feet of the cabin, he stopped suddenly.

"We must approach with caution, Gunner," he said. "The yellow hahoe* is probably armed with a tork, and it wouldn't be healthy for us if he saw or heard us coming. Better go in from two different directions, too, so if he gets one of us the other will have a chance at him."

They separated accordingly, and circling the cabin, crept cautiously up to it from opposite directions. The first to reach the front of the little building, Grandon saw the door standing wide open. With drawn scarbo, he leaped through, then stopped in amazement, for a single glance around the room told him that it was deserted.

The gunner was only a few steps behind Grandon.

"Gone?" he asked.

"So it seems. But where?"

Hanging on a peg at one side of the room was a belt containing a scarbo, tork and knife. Grandon's shoulder struck the hanging scarbo and it clanked against the tork.

"What's this?" he exclaimed, lifting the belt from the peg. "Why, these are the weapons of San Thoy! His name is engraved on the belt buckle in patoan characters."

"I judge that he would not willingly have left without them."

"No, not willingly."

"Then who could have carried them off, and what has become of Her Majesty, your wife?"

"Who but the Valkars, those toad-like monsters described by our prisoner? We must find the trail. I'll take San Thoy's weapons and give the other scarbo to you. Then we'll both be fully armed."

Soon Grandon, who had learned his woodcraft from the Fighting Traveks, his fierce mountaineer subjects of Uxpo, and learned it well, discovered blood spots about a hundred feet from the door of the hut. And in the soft leaf mold were the small footprints of a woman, the larger prints of a man, and the still larger tracks of webbed and clawed feet. Kantar, who was born and bred in the mountain fastnesses of Uxpo, read the signs as quickly as did the Earth-man.

* A scaly, three-horned, hyena-like creature of Venus. Used here as a term of contempt.

"She ran out here to escape the yellow pirate," he said.

"And both were carried off by the Valkars," finished Grandon. "Blood was spilled. I trust that it was not hers."

"It starts at the point where San Thoy was lifted off his feet."

"True enough. Let us hope for the best. And now to the trail."

It was not difficult for the two trained woodmen to follow the well-marked trail of the toad people. It led them through the belt of thick fern-forest that fringed the shore, and across a range of rugged and sparsely wooded hills, into a gloomy and treacherous swamp. Here Grandon, at almost the first step, sank into a quagmire up to his chin. It would speedily have closed over his head, had not Kantar been there to extend a helping hand. Even then, it was with the greatest difficulty that the gunner succeeded in drawing him out of the clinging, sticky mess.

After this misadventure, Grandon took more care where he stepped, quickly learning that a piece of ground which was safe for a web-footed Valkar might be extremely perilous for a man. He chafed at the delay occasioned by the necessity of testing each bit of soil before stepping on it, but was constrained by the obvious verity that if he did not travel with caution his travels would soon be terminated.

Nor was the treacherous footing the sole menace the swamp held for the two. They were constantly compelled to be on the lookout for venomous snakes which crawled across their pathway and tremendous whistling serpents that dangled from tree limbs, waiting for unsuspecting victims on which to drop, then crush the life out of them with their immense muscular coils. In addition, they were compelled to avoid the huge saurians which made the morass their habitation. Some of these were herbivores, and harmless unless disturbed, but others, the mighty carnivores which fed on these and any other smaller bits of flesh which came their way, would make short work of them if they suspected this pair of tender, two-legged animals was crossing their feeding-ground. Annoying, too, were the constant attacks of biting and stinging insect pests which buzzed in thick clouds about them.

BOTH men heaved a sigh of relief when they presently reached higher and drier ground, for though the tall grass through which the path wound might harbor even more dangerous enemies than they had seen in the swamp, they were at least sure of their footing and soon left the bulk of their insect tormenters behind.

They had traveled about a mile into this grassy savanna, when Grandon suddenly caught his companion by the arm.

"Quiet!" he said. "I hear something coming!"

Unmistakably there came to the ears of both the sound of someone or something speeding through the tall grass, then a shriek of pain or terror and a hoarse, booming croak.

"Come on," cried Grandon. "It's a fellow human attacked by some fierce beast."

They had only taken a few steps in the direction of the sounds when there hove into view, running for his life, a short, bandy-legged yellow man. Although neither Grandon nor Kantar had ever seen a Valkar, both instantly identified the hideous, warty creature which followed in swift pursuit, from the description their former prisoner had given them. It was rapidly shortening the distance between itself and its shrieking quarry, and the long pole it carried, tipped with a barbed hook, was extended to transfix its victim.

Kantar elevated the muzzle of his tork.

"Don't shoot," warned Grandon. "The sound may betray us, and bring a horde of those creatures. You grab the yellow man and I'll take the Valkar."

Whipping out his scarbo, the Earth-man accordingly crouched in the grass at one side of the path, while Kantar, similarly armed, concealed himself on the other side.

Just as he came opposite them, the fugitive was caught by the barbed hook. He uttered an agonized shriek as it pierced his arm. But before his pursuer could jerk him backward, Kantar's scarbo had cut through the shaft. And Grandon, blade in hand, had leaped at the Valkar.

Although he was taken by surprize, the toad-man was remarkably quick. Dropping his useless shaft, he snatched his long knife from his belt and raised it to parry the cut which Grandon aimed at his head. It turned the blade of the scarbo so that, in descending, it only cut a small slice from the scaly shoulder. At the same instant, with lightning quickness, he struck at the Earth-man with the mace in his left hand.

The blow took Grandon by surprize, and the hooked bill bit into his right shoulder, which he had instinctively raised to protect his face, inflicting a painful wound. With a croak of triumph, the monster jerked the Earth-man toward him, intent on finishing him with the knife. But at that instant Grandon drew back his lowered scarbo, then thrust upward with all his might. The blade, driven with terrific force, entered the silver-gray throat, and passing upward through the head, came out between the bulging eyes. With a hoarse death-croak, the Valkar sank to the ground, kicking convulsively.

Kantar came running up, dragging his yellow prisoner, from whose arm he had extracted the barbed hook.

"Why, you are bleeding, Majesty!" he exclaimed.

"Only a flesh wound," replied Grandon. "I'll be all right."

The gunner twisted the small cup from the top of his kova flask, and held it to the bleeding throat of the dying Valkar. In an instant it was filled with blood. He stood up and proffered the cup to Grandon.

"You must drink this quickly, Majesty," he said, "or your wound may prove fatal."

"What's the matter with you?" demanded the Earth-man. "Have you gone crazy?"

"Drink quickly, I beg of you. It is the only antidote for the venom with which these monsters smear their weapons."

"Right. I had forgotten what our prisoner told us." He took the proffered cup, and with a wry face, drained it. The wounded yellow man, whose wrist Kantar was holding, had meanwhile crouched down and was lapping at the bleeding throat of the Valkar.

"Let me bind your wound, Majesty," said the gunner.

"No. It is not large, and will close of itself. Meanwhile, let us examine this prisoner." He glared at the diminutive yellow man, who now stood with bowed head, his wrist still clutched by Kantar. "Are you San Thoy?" he asked.

"No, Majesty," replied the prisoner, who, noting the scarlet of Grandon's attire was aware that he stood before royalty. "San Thoy is a great mojak while I, as Your Majesty may see by the remains of my raiment, am only a common sailor."

"Your name, sailor."

"So Lan, Majesty, late of the ship *Saugama,* of the Imperial Navy of Huitsen. I was captured by the Valkars three endirs

ago with a dozen of my mates when we were sent ashore for fresh water. Today I escaped from the prison compound, but this Valkar hunter saw me, and would have slain me or taken me back a prisoner had you not come up."

"Saw you ought of San Thoy?"

"He, and a beautiful white princess, who some say was Vernia of Reabon, were brought in prisoners this morning."

"Where are they now?"

"The white princess was brought to the slave compound shortly before I made my escape. It was the attention she attracted, both from the slaves and the Valkars, which made it possible for me to get away undetected."

"And what do these Valkars intend to do with her? Hold her for ransom?"

"No, Majesty. They care nothing for money, or any other things of great worth. But I heard that Grunk, their Rogo, who has never before captured a human female, planned to keep her for the purpose of breeding a race of slaves."

"Enough! Lead us at once to this compound. Perform your task faithfully, take me to a spot where I can set eyes on my wife, and you will be permitted to escape again. But remember, one sign of treachery, and you die."

"Your wife! Then you are the famed Grandon of Terra, the hero from the planet Mignor,* who won the most beautiful woman on Zorovia!" He dropped to his knees, and with both hands extended, palms downward, pressed his forehead to the ground. "I do homage to so mighty a swordsman and so famed a ruler," he muttered.

"Up, and cease this mummery, or by the bones of Thorth, I'll split your head and go on without a guide. Vernia of Reabon will take her own life rather than submit to the dictates of this reptilian rogo. As it is, we may be too late."

The pirate scrambled hastily to his feet.

"I'll guide you, Majesty, and quickly," he promised, "but we must circle the Valkar village to reach the compound. Otherwise we should not be permitted to go far."

He set off at once through the tall, rustling grass, with Grandon, scarbo in hand, just behind him, and Kantar bringing up the rear. After a short walk Grandon heard, only a little way ahead of them, the chatter of human conversation and the croaking of Valkars punctuated by the sharp clanking of metal.

So Lan turned. "The compound is just ahead," he whispered. "Those are the sounds made by the metal-workers and their overseers."

The three crept cautiously forward now, and So Lan, parting the grass, pointed to an enclosure by a paling of metal bars, in the center of which was a large, moss-covered mound.

Grandon's heart gave a great bound as he saw Vernia standing beside a pile of knives. Then he cried out in anguish, and would have leaped forward had not Kantar detained him, as he saw her snatch a knife and attempt to plunge it into her bosom. But it was instantly shaken from her grasp by one of the yellow slaves who had snatched her wrist. Fortunately, Grandon's involuntary cry had not been heard in that bedlam of sound, and so the three men still crouched there, undetected.

"What are we to do now, Majesty?" asked Kantar.

"I don't know, Gunner. Let me think —let me plan. A sudden rush and a shower of tork bullets might be best. And yet it might mean the death of Vernia. We must try to think of a better scheme."

He turned to the yellow man who still

* Zorovian name for the Earth.

crouched in the grass beside him. "You may go now, So Lan. You have earned your freedom."

"Your Majesty has saved the life of So Lan," replied the pirate, "and he is not ungrateful. Permit him to remain near you, that he may be of assistance in the rescue of Her Majesty, your wife."

"How? You are unarmed. But wait. Perhaps we can use you, for you could pass unnoticed among the slaves where one of us would be instantly detected."

"I but await Your Majesty's commands," replied So Lan, bowing low.

CHAPTER 7

HUMAN SACRIFICE

VERNIA strove to wrench her arm free, but she was helpless in the grip of the filthy and ragged Hui Sen. He grinned the hideous, toothless grin of the Huitsenni, and pushed a fresh quid of kerra spores into his cheek as he dragged her toward the gate.

"Where are you taking me?" she demanded.

"First to the burrow of His Majesty, Grunk, Rogo of the Valkars, that he may give you his commands in person. Then, if he does not change his mind, which he sometimes does, but which I hope will not be the case in this instance, I will take you to my own burrow."

"Suppose that I should offer you the wealth and position of a prince—make you rich and powerful beyond your fondest dreams. Would you help me to escape?"

"That would be impossible, Majesty. I am not so strong a swimmer that I could reach your country from here, and the Valkars would not give us time to build a boat."

"But there is a small sailboat, provisioned and ready, in the harbor where your fleets stop for fresh water. If we could reach it and get away by night, surely you are enough of a navigator to sail it to Reabon. And what I promise, I will perform."

"We will speak of this later, Majesty," replied Hui Sen. "Just now I must take you before the Rogo." He entered into a short, croaking conversation with the Valkar guard at the gate, who then swung it open, permitting them to pass.

As they threaded their way between the moss-covered mounds toward the burrow of Grunk, Hui Sen looked cautiously about him as if fearful of being overheard, then said: "I can not deny, Majesty, that the station and wealth of a prince would be a great temptation to me, for I have lived in squalor these many years. And while living thus, my only solace has been in dreams of splendor and power. But the risk would be tremendous. To pass the Valkar guards would not be easy. To cross the swamp without a Valkar guide would be next to impossible. Were it not for that swamp, my people would long ago have exterminated the Valkars. There is also the possibility that the boat might not be there, in which event the Valkars would be sure to find us, and I, at least, would be horribly punished. Added to these, and by far not the least of the considerations, would be the fact that I should lose you as my mate."

"On that score, at least, you may set yourself at rest," said Vernia. "Does the hahoe take the mate of the marmelot, or the awoo the mate of the ramph? Grandon of Terra is my mate, and sooner or later he will find this island, wipe the Valkars from the face of the planet, and all with them who have offered me indignity."

"Grandon of Terra will not find this place," said Hui Sen, confidently. "You

can not frighten me with his name, mighty as I know it to be."

"You will remember, also," continued Vernia, "that the mate of the marmelot is not without claws. I promise you that, if you offer me any indignity, I will slay you at the first opportunity, and myself, also. Sleeping or waking, your life will never be safe if you drag me off to your stinking burrow."

"That I know you would do," replied Hui Sen, seemingly impressed, "for the women of Reabon were ever jealous of their honor. Night and day, I would always be on my guard, unless, perchance, you should learn to love me."

"Love you? Why, you greasy yellow beast! You unspeakable filth! Sooner would I love a warty Valkar." This was said with flashing eyes, and an imperious mien that humbled the yellow man.

"I mean no offense, Majesty," he whined. "Even a worm may look at a star with the hope that, inaccessible as it seems, it shines favorably upon him. But here we are at the burrow of the Rogo."

They were about to enter when Hui Sen halted and cocked his head to one side at the sound of a distant ululation, long drawn out and exceedingly mournful.

"What was that?" asked Vernia.

"The cry of the guards," replied Hui Sen. "Sistabez, the great serpent, has come out of his cave.

The howling grew in volume as thousands of Valkar throats all over the village took it up. At this instant, Grunk, Rogo of the Valkars, emerged from his burrow, accompanied by Lui Sen and his two immense Valkar guards, both of which, with their noses elevated and their mouths open from ear to ear, were howling lustily. The din had now grown so loud that speech was impossible, but Grunk, after staring fixedly at Vernia and Hui Sen for a moment with his great, gold-rimmed eyes, made a sign that they should follow him, and strode off between the moss-covered mounds toward the place from which the howling had first come. Judging from the mob of Valkars, male and female, old and young, which was heading in the same direction, it was evident that the entire village had turned out.

The hurrying, jostling crowd respectfully made way for the Rogo and his party, and they soon reached the edge of the village. Here a narrow path led up a rugged hillside, strewn with boulders and sparsely dotted with low-growing shrubs. At intervals of about a hundred feet along this path, heavy iron stakes had been driven into the ground.

To the farthest of these stakes, a luckless yellow slave had already been fastened. Another was being secured to the next stake, and two guards were marching a third up to the next.

SUDDENLY every voice was hushed, and Vernia saw an enormous and hideous head round a curve in the rugged hillside. It was about ten feet in length, and six in width at its broadest point, tapering down to a square muzzle about two feet across. This massive head was reared on a thick neck fully four feet in diameter, to a height of about twenty feet above the ground. Behind it trailed a tremendous length of sinuous body. In color it was muddy green above, and the under scales were a greenish lemon-yellow.

Languidly, unhurriedly, the monster glided down the path, surveying the immense crowd of Valkars and yellow slaves before it with apparent indifference. Presently, as it came to the first slave that had been bound in its path, it paused, and leisurely arched its neck. The other two slaves had, meanwhile, been tethered and left to their fate. All three

unfortunates struggled desperately, and cried out for mercy, but as the serpent poised over the first wretch, he ceased his struggles and importunities.

There was a quick, downward dart of the massive head, so swift that the eye could scarcely follow, and a single shriek from the victim as the immense jaws closed upon him, breaking his bonds like cobwebs. Then a significant lump slid down the serpent's throat to disappear in its tremendous coils.

Leisurely the snake crawled forward once more, seized and swallowed its next shrieking victim. It paused for a moment, but as it moved on toward the third, a fourth victim was quickly chained in its path.

"Sistabez is hungry today," Hui Sen said to Vernia.

The snake swallowed the third victim, and continued on toward the fourth.

"He is very hungry," said Hui Sen.

As it moved forward this time, the serpent's red forked tongue darted from its mouth, appearing and disappearing with the rapidity of lightning.

"He grows angry," cried Hui Sen, in alarm.

At this instant, Grunk turned and croaked something to two guards, who came toward Vernia.

"What did he say?" she asked Hui Sen.

"He said," replied that worthy, "that Sistabez was angry because he had withheld the fair white prisoner from him. He ordered the guards to tie you to the fifth stake."

With a sudden wrench, Vernia freed her wrist from the grasp of the yellow man, then turned to flee. But before she had taken ten steps the Valkar guards had her. The fourth victim shrieked his last as she was dragged to the stake and securely bound. The two guards retreated precipitately as the serpent advanced, this time traveling more swiftly than before, its tongue flashing like red forked lightning.

CHAPTER 8

THE WRATH OF THE SERPENT

CROUCHING in the grass near the slave compound with Kantar and So Lan, Grandon saw the yellow slave who had prevented Vernia from taking her own life, lead her through the gate.

"Where is he taking her?" he asked So Lan.

"They walk toward the burrow of Grunk," replied So Lan. "I think she will be taken before the Rogo of the Valkars."

"And then?"

Grunk will probably decide which of the slaves is to take her to his burrow."

"Do you think you can go down into the village without being apprehended?"

"I believe so, Majesty. No alarm has been sounded, so I take it that I have not yet been missed. The Valkar that was pursuing me was a hunter I had encountered at some distance from the village."

"Very well. Suppose you—but wait! What is that howling sound?"

"The guards are warning the Valkars that Sistabez, the great serpent, has awakened, and is emerging from his den. No need to go into the village now, for every one will attend the sacrifice."

"Sistabez?"

"A huge snake worshipped by the Valkars as a god. When he comes forth they chain slaves in his pathway, in order that he may not raid the village. Naturally they value their own lives above those of their prisoners."

"And Vernia is a prisoner! Can you get us quickly to this place of sacrifice?"

"We will have to circle the village, Majesty. It will take quite a while."

"Then hurry."

"This way." So Lan dashed off through the tall grass with Grandon and Kantar at his heels.

Before they had gone far, it was obvious to Grandon that the Valkars would reach the place of sacrifice long before they would. Fuming at the delay, he kept urging the little yellow man to his best paces, but though he was willing enough, his short legs would not carry him nearly so fast as the two impatient white men could travel.

The howling from the village was deafening for some time, but to Grandon's surprize, it suddenly ceased altogether.

"Sistabez has reached the place of sacrifice," panted So Lan. "The Valkars always quit their howling when he is ready to take his first victim."

Grandon, who could restrain his impatience no longer, now thrust his puffing and nearly exhausted guide out of the way, and dashed forward at top speed. He needed no guide a moment later, for the shriek of the snake's first victim rang in his ears. Closely followed by Kantar, he bounded straight toward that sound. A short time after he heard, much closer, the cry of the second victim, then, still closer, the third, and finally the fourth.

A moment later, he bounded out into the open space at the base of the hill, in front of which the Valkars had assembled. Vernia had just been bound to the stake, and the two Valkars who had tied her were fleeing for their lives as the great serpent advanced toward her.

"Try to keep the crowd back, Gunner," he shouted to Kantar as he whipped out his scarbo and sprinted for the stake. The two Valkars who had bound Vernia tried to stop him, but he elevated the muzzle of his tork and sprayed them with neddle-like bullets. One of them fell, gasping and kicking his last, for Grandon had loaded the weapon with a clip of projectiles he had found in the belt-pouch of San Thoy, which contained enough poison to kill a dozen men. He dispatched the other toad-man with his scarbo.

A few swift strides carried him to Vernia's side, and two strokes of his scarbo freed her. She was so overcome by the ordeal through which she had just passed that she swooned, and would have fallen, had not Grandon sheathed his scarbo and caught her up in his arms.

All this took place in less than a minute, and during this time the tork of the gunner had been popping to good purpose, as attested by the ring of fallen Valkars which had been bold enough to rush him. Now, as Grandon dashed back into the tall grass with Vernia in his arms, Kantar ran in behind him to cover his retreat.

The serpent, meanwhile, had not shown any interest in these proceedings, but had crawled on past the stake to seize and swallow the two Valkars that still lay kicking on the ground.

"What kind of bullets are you using?" Grandon asked the gunner, as they plunged into the grass.

"Deadly," he replied.

"Put in a clip of solid bullets for a moment," directed Grandon, "and give that big snake a half-dozen or so in the neck."

Kantar chuckled as he swiftly carried out the Earth-man's instructions. "A great idea, Majesty," he said. "It will give the ugly toads something to do besides chasing us."

KANTAR was the best marksman in the Reabonian army, either with a tork or mattork, and it was child's play for him to quickly place the bullets as he had been directed. The effect on the huge serpent was instantaneous. With its

forked tongue playing so rapidly that the eye could scarcely follow, and an angry hissing sound that was almost like the roar of steam escaping from a locomotive, it coiled and struck again and again into the closely packed crowd of Valkars, a tremendous living engine of destruction. Before, it had only been satisfying its hunger. Now it was taking swift and terrible toll of those creatures which it believed responsible for its hurts.

With his own tork, Grandon meanwhile shot down a score of Valkars that had followed them, giving the gunner time to reload with the deadly projectiles. As they hurried forward once more, they were joined by So Lan, who had armed himself with a hook, mace and knife taken from one of the fallen Valkars.

"Take care not to scratch yourself or any one else with those weapons," warned Kantar as they trotted through the grass. "We have no Valkar blood for an antidote, now."

"I have seen to that," replied So Lan. He raised the flap of his belt pouch, and disclosed a slice of still quivering flesh. "This will serve all of us if need arise."

It was evident that the Valkars were well occupied with their own troubles, as none appeared to molest them for some time. They soon found the path which led from the village to the swamp, and had followed this for about a mile, when Vernia, still in her husband's arms, recovered consciousness and demanded to be set on her feet.

"I can carry you all the way to the boat, if need be," Grandon protested.

"No, Bob. You must save your strength, for we will have need of it. I can walk as well as any of you, now. Besides, your hands must be free to grasp your weapons. The Valkars may catch up with us at any time."

"I rather think they're pretty well occupied with their own troubles, right now. But try it for a while if you must. I can carry you again if you tire."

They set off at a fast walk, but had not gone far when Kantar, who was at the rear, softly called: "Majesty."

Grandon turned. "What is it?"

"Something following us. I see the grass waving."

"We'll make a stand," Grandon decided, "and give them a warm reception if they're Valkars."

A moment later, a short yellow man appeared in the pathway. He was followed by five more. Grandon recognized the leader as San Thoy, and whipping out his scarbo, advanced toward him, ignoring the others.

"So," he thundered, "you are the yellow filth who abducted my wife!"

San Thoy cringed, then dropped to his knees with right hand extended palm downward, as Grandon towered above him with upraised scarbo.

"No, no, Majesty! Spare me! There is a misunderstanding! I tried to rescue Her Majesty. We stopped at the cabin to wait for daylight, that I might take her to the Reabonian coast."

"Ah! Then you did not, with your unwelcome advances, drive her forth into the night to be captured by Valkars?" He turned to Kantar. "Lend this rakehelly of Huitsen your blade, Gunner, that I may settle accounts with him."

San Thoy quaked with fear.

"But I am no swordsman, Majesty," he whined, "to oppose the mightiest blade on Zorovia. It would be murder. Besides, as Thorth is my witness, I do not recall offering any affront to Her Gracious Majesty. My head became so addled with kova that I did not know I had been wounded and captured by the Valkars until this morning."

"I perceive," said Grandon, contemp-

tuously, "that you are a liar and a coward as well as a rogue. What shall I do with the vermin, Gunner?"

"Strike off his head, sire, and leave his foul remains to the jungle scavengers."

"Right. It is the least that he deserves."

San Thoy cringed, expecting the death blow as Grandon raised his blade. But it did not fall, for at this moment Vernia caught his arm.

"Please, Bob, I can't let you do it," she said. "Spare him for my sake."

"It is for your sake that I would put an end to him," replied Grandon. "To permit him to live after——"

"Please. Remember Tholto, the marshman. You would have slain him for a similar offense, but spared him because I requested it. And he afterward saved my honor when I was in the power of Zanaloth of Mernerum. Later, he saved both our lives."

"True," replied Grandon, "but this vile creature is no more like Tholto than a Valkar is like me. Yet, because it is your request, I can not do otherwise than spare him." He spurned the groveling San Thoy with his foot. "Get up," he commanded, "and remember that you are indebted to the Torroga of Reabon for your worthless life."

"Then may we accompany Your Majesties through the swamp to the coast?" asked one of the escaped slaves who had come up with San Thoy. "We could not find the way, unaided, and we are not armed against the monsters we should be sure to encounter."

"We are not anxious for such company," replied Grandon, "but you may follow behind us."

They set off once more, Grandon leading, closely followed by Vernia, So Lan, and Kantar. At a respectful distance behind the gunner walked San Thoy and his band.

A SHORT march took them to the treacherous swamp, where Grandon was able to make much better time than on his previous trip through it, by backtracking in his own footsteps. But their progress was slow at best, and it was not long before there came an imploring cry from San Thoy.

"The Valkars are coming! Save us! Save us!"

"They don't deserve it," said Grandon, "but after all, they're fellow human beings, unarmed and in danger. Bring your comrades forward, San Thoy," he called, "and you, Gunner, guard the rear. If you can't handle things, let me know, and I'll come back with you."

Kantar stood aside until San Thoy and his comrades had time to close in behind So Lan. Then he fell in behind the last man, and as they marched forward, glanced back from time to time to note the proximity of the enemy. He soon saw that the Valkars were gaining rapidly on them, and also that they were not keeping to the trail, but were spreading out in a crescent-shaped line, evidently with the intention of surrounding them. After communicating this intelligence to Grandon, he began picking off with his tork such Valkars as came dangerously close.

Presently, when the dull-witted Valkars began to realize that to expose themselves to the gunner's deadly aim meant sure death, they took advantage of cover. This slowed them a bit, but still their pace was swifter than that of Grandon's party, as their webbed feet gave them considerable advantage in traveling over the swampy ground. Soon the two horns of their crescent caught up with Grandon, who began using his tork as frequently as Kantar, though with not quite such

deadly precision. With sword or scarbo he had not met his equal on all Zorovia, but there was only one Kantar the Gunner, and Grandon, though an excellent shot, bowed to his uncanny skill with the weapon.

Between the two of them, Grandon and Kantar managed to keep their enemies at bay until they reached the more solid footing of the sparsely wooded hills. But in the meantime, the horns of the crescent had closed in front of them. On the firmer ground, however, their speed exceeded that of the Valkars, and since they no longer feared those behind them, but only those in front and at the sides, he changed his formation, massing the non-combatants in the center, while he and the gunner ranged on each side.

Only a few of the Valkars had succeeded in getting ahead of them, and these quickly succumbed to the marksmanship of the two men. Then Grandon ordered a swift charge across the hill that confronted them, and beyond which was the thick fern forest that fringed the bay. When he reached the brow of the hill he glanced back and saw that several hundred Valkars had already emerged from the swamp, while at least a thousand swarmed through the muck and water behind them. But the sight of this vast force did not dismay him, for he knew that his party could easily outrun them on the firm ground that lay ahead, and that they would have ample time to launch the little boat which San Thoy had moored near the cabin.

They dashed down the rugged hillside, and plunged into the fern forest just as the front lines of their pursuers swept over the brow of the hill. But Grandon had scarcely taken fifty steps into the forest shadows, when a heavy body fell on his back from the branches above, knocking him to the ground. It was quickly followed by a half-dozen more, and though the Earth-man managed to struggle to his feet, his arms were pinioned behind him and his weapons taken away. He had led his party directly into an ambush of yellow pirates. Kantar, he observed, had been served in like manner.

Suddenly then, as if by magic, a whole army of Huitsenni appeared, stepping from behind tree-trunks, bushes and rocks, and dropping from the dense tangle of branches overhead. The little party was completely surrounded and hopelessly outnumbered.

Waddling toward them through the ranks of the pirates, who respectfully made way for him, Grandon now recognized Thid Yet, Romojak of the Navies of Huitsen.

Thid Yet expectorated a red stream of kerra juice and grinned toothlessly, as he bowed before Grandon and Vernia.

"I am gratified that we arrived in time to save Your Majesties from the Valkars," he said. "Guest chambers have been prepared for you and your warrior aboard my flagship." His eyes next fell on the cowering San Thoy. "So, traitor, we meet again. I doubt not that His Majesty of Huitsen will contrive exquisite tortures for you when he has heard the story of your perfidy. Seize him, men." His glance next fell on So Lan and the other unarmed yellow men who formed the balance of the party. "Who are you?" he asked.

"We are from various crews, Excellency, sent ashore for water and captured in engagements with the Valkars, who held us as slaves," replied So Lan.

"So? Then report to my mojo, who will assign you new berths."

At this moment, one of Thid Yet's aides ran up to announce that the Valkars were attacking in force.

"Tell the mattork crews to make a stand at the edge of the woods and mow them down without mercy," commanded Thid Yet. "These warty monsters need a lesson, and now is the time to read them one they will not soon forget."

As they marched toward the harbor, Grandon heard the rattle of mattork fire, which continued for several minutes. Then it suddenly stopped, and he concluded that the Valkars, seeing that they had run into an ambush, had retreated. This he afterward learned was really the case.

They found the beach lined with the small boats of the Huitsenni, while the pirate fleet rode at anchor less than a quarter of a mile from the entrance to the cove. Grandon, Vernia, Kantar and San Thoy were rowed to the flagship in the boat of Thid Yet. Back on the deck of the vessel once more, the Romojak gave swift orders.

"Return Her Majesty of Reabon to her former quarters, and keep her door constantly guarded," he told his mojo. "His Majesty, here, together with his warrior and our treacherous mojak, will have to be put in irons and confined below decks. And keep two armed guards constantly before their door. They escaped too easily the last time."

Vernia was led away to her cabin, and the three men were fitted with thick metal collars, to which heavy chains were attached, linking them together. Then they were lowered down a hatchway and marched along a corridor, to be thrust into a small and exceedingly filthy room. The door of heavy serali planks was barred, and Grandon heard two guards take their places before it.

Soon the anchors were hoisted and the sails unfurled. With the flagship in the lead, the fleet once more sailed southward.

CHAPTER 9

THE SECRET GATE

The room in which Grandon, Kantar and San Thoy had been confined on the pirate ship was immediately below the deck, hence free from the bilge-water which swished in the hold below, though not from the offensive odor which arose from it. Light filtered down to them through the loosely fitted deck planking and also shone through several small holes, each about two inches in diameter, which were bored high up in the ship's side, evidently to serve as loopholes through which torks might be fired. But they also acted, to some extent, as ventilators, making it possible for the prisoners to breathe the fresh sea air by pressing their noses to them, as well as admitting enough light to partly dispel the cheerless gloom of the humid and stuffy interior.

The chains with which the three men were fastened together by their metal collars, were about five feet in length, the gunner being in the middle and Grandon and San Thoy at either end. After they had sniffed the fresh air for some time, the three sat down, as if by mutual consent, resting their backs against the rough wall.

"Well, Gunner, it looks as if Thid Yet has us in a tight place this time," said Grandon.

"We have been in tighter, Majesty," replied Kantar.

"True. But this arrangement presents a rather knotty problem. In the first place, there are two guards outside the door now instead of one. In the second place, the wily Romojak has chained us to that carrion," indicating San Thoy, "who will surely make an outcry if we attempt an escape. Of course we can throttle him, or dash his brains out against the wall, but it would be difficult to slay him so

quietly that the guards outside the door would not hear, and at least suspect something amiss."

San Thoy shifted his quid of kerra spores and spat through a crack.

"May I remind Your Majesty," he said, "that I am as anxious to escape from Thid Yet as you? I am to be slain by slow torture upon my arrival in Huitsen."

"True," replied Grandon. "Perhaps you will be worthy of our confidence on that score, if on no other."

At this moment one of the guards opened the door to admit a menial from the galley. This greasy and profusely perspiring individual carried a tray on which were three large eating-bowls and three smaller drinking-bowls. These he set before the prisoners, and hastily withdrew as if fearful that they might attack him.

When the door had closed behind him, San Thoy quickly rolled up his red quid and stuck it to the back of his left hand. Then with his right he dipped into his eating-bowl, feeding greedily and from time to time taking copious drafts from his drinking-bowl to wash down the food which he could only mumble.

Grandon examined the mixture in the bowl before him. It smelled savory enough, and upon tasting it, he found that it was a mixture of flaked fish and chopped mushrooms, stewed together in a sauce that was highly spiced and quite peppery. His drinking-bowl contained freshly brewed kova, slightly weak, but palatable.

"Not bad for prison fare," he commented to the gunner, who he noticed had begun to make good progress with his meal.

"It's the one good thing about these yellow vermin which I am willing to concede. They can certainly cook," replied Kantar.

"We are fortunate in being imprisoned with royalty," said San Thoy, smacking his lips. "We should not otherwise be so well fed." His meal over, he deftly flipped the red quid from the back of his left hand into his toothless mouth, and resumed his mumbling.

For many days the three men were kept in their stuffy prison. They were fed three times a day, but otherwise saw nothing of their captors. By peering through the loopholes they could amuse themselves in the daytime by watching such birds, fish and reptiles as came within their line of vision.

During this period, however, they had not been idle in attempting to find some way of escape. It was the gunner whose ingenuity devised the means for the first step in this direction. Although he had been disarmed he had not been deprived of the small packet of tools commonly carried by every man of his profession, which were for the purpose of taking apart and assembling mattorks that sometimes jammed or failed in other ways to work properly and smoothly. These tools, like those used by terrestrial watch-makers, were small and fine, as the mechanisms on which they were used were extremely delicate.

He began on the lock which held Grandon's metal collar around his neck. The task seemed hopeless at first, for the Huitsenni were skilled in the fabrication of such things as fetters, weapons and instruments of torture. But after many days of patient work he eventually had the satisfaction of springing the clasp, making it possible for the Earth-man to remove his collar by simply bending it back on the hinge. Grandon then worked on the gunner's collar under his direction, and not being mechanically inclined, took considerable time in achieving the same favor for his henchman.

This done, Grandon suggested that the gunner open the lock on San Thoy's collar. The task did not please him, but he was too well trained a soldier to quarrel with the orders of his sovereign, and so carried out his distasteful duty without a murmur.

They had got this far with their plans for escape, and were considering what their next move should be, when Kantar, who had been standing with his eye to a loophole, suddenly informed the Earthman that he saw land.

GRANDON leaped to a hole beside him and peered out. He saw that the ship was entering what appeared to be the narrow channel of a fiord. The rugged cliffs, sparsely clad in places with stunted conifers, towered to a tremendous height above the placid waters, which calmly reflected their beetling frowns. Sharp commands and the creaking of pulleys were heard above them as the sails were lowered. Then oars rattled, and splashed into the water, thrust through the rowing-holes beneath them.

San Thoy had told Grandon and Kantar that Huitsen, the capital city of the Huitsenni, could be reached from the sea only by way of a hidden passage through towering cliffs. If he had spoken truth, then this was the beginning of that passageway, and the time left to them for freeing themselves and Vernia, and attempting to escape, was short indeed. The pirate himself confirmed this a moment later, as he too sprang up to peer through a loophole.

"This is the way to the secret gate," he said. "Watch, and you will see how it is opened."

Grandon's first thought was that they must immediately attempt escape, for once in the notorious port of peril, this would undoubtedly prove impossible. Yet a rash attempt now seemed equally hopeless. He had counted on darkness as an ally, but it was yet midafternoon, and the probability was that the fleet would dock ere the black, moonless night of Venus should descend. He had expected to strike that very evening, when the cook's helper would bring them their repast. Leaving San Thoy to deal with the helper, he and the gunner had planned to spring upon the two guards who stood outside the door. Could the deed have been accomplished without great noise, the rest would not have been impracticable; for under cover of darkness it would have been possible for the three men to rescue Vernia from her cabin, steal a boat, and be off.

But now, it seemed, they must make new plans.

"How soon will we dock, San Thoy?" he asked.

"In a very short time now, Majesty," was the reply.

"Before dark?"

"Oh, long before."

Grandon pondered for a moment. Then he spoke to Kantar. "We'll have to think up a new scheme, Gunner. And when the time comes, we'll have to think fast."

"I will look for a sign from you when the time does come," replied Kantar.

"And I, also, Majesty," echoed San Thoy. Then he exclaimed: "See! They are opening the secret entrance!"

The channel had narrowed now, so much that it seemed the ship's oars would be shattered against the jagged cliffs. And straight ahead was what appeared to be a solid wall of rock, barring their further progress. Astounded, Grandon saw that a crooked crack extending medially from top to bottom was slowly widening as the two halves of the wall ahead, each of which must have weighed thousands

of tons, moved apart and slid into the cliffs on each side.

The ship nosed through the opening and into a dark cavern. The lights flashed on, and revealed a stalactite-festooned ceiling overhead, while the peaks of white stalagmites, projecting above the surface of the water, made it obvious that the floor of the cave had not always been flooded. Save for the gong which timed the strokes of the rowers, and the splashing of the oars, the place was as quiet as a tomb, its placid waters gleaming mirror-like ahead of the ship and rippling in the spreading wake like molten jet shot with silver reflections.

Presently daylight appeared ahead, and the ship's lights were turned off. A moment later they emerged through a high, arched opening into a canal. The straight banks were lined with masonry, evidently to prevent the salt water from seeping through and spoiling the crops of edible mushrooms, food ferns and kerra ferns which were cultivated in orderly fields on either side. Those who worked in these fields, San Thoy said, were slaves who represented most of the races and nationalities of Zorovia, some captured in coastal raids, but most taken from ships that had fallen prey to the yellow pirates.

Swiftly propelled by the lusty strokes of the rowers, and again aided by the bat-wing sails, which had been unfolded as soon as the cave mouth was left behind, the ship glided into a circular land-locked harbor, lined with docks built of serali wood and set on pilings of the same tough material. Behind the docks were warehouses of white stone, and beyond these, at the far side, Grandon could see the conical roofs and upper structures of what appeared to be a large and populous city, principally composed of odd, hive-shaped buildings unlike anything he had ever seen or heard of, either on Earth or Venus.

Thousands of queer, bat-winged craft of the pirates were moored at the docks, and many more rode at anchor in the harbor. There were also a large number of the merchant and fishing ships captured by the Huitsenni and brought in as prizes. Some of these were undergoing alterations, being fitted with the bat-wing sails, and otherwise converted for the use of the yellow men.

STILL peering through his loophole, Grandon saw that the flagship was nearing the dock. Soon the long oars beneath him were drawn in, and ropes were cast to waiting Huitsenni, who made them fast.

From almost directly above Grandon's head, a gangplank was lowered, striking the dock with a heavy thud. Down this plank walked Thid Yet, Romojak of the Navies of Huitsen, escorting Vernia. The Princess looked deathly pale, but showed no other sign of fear. With her head held proudly erect, and graceful carriage, she showed only disdain for her squat, greasy captor, slouching along beside her. Behind them strode a guard of six pirates, drawn scarbos in their hands.

A great lumbering one-wheeled vehicle, its cab supported on an inner idling-wheel at its center, rumbled up to the dock. These vehicles were common everywhere on Zorovia, but not the beasts that drew this one. Hitched, one before and one behind the great wheel, they were larger than Norman horses, covered with long white curly hair of a silky texture, and each armed with three twisted horns, one curving forward from the tip of the nose and the other two arching above the eyes. Their ankles, also, were armed with sharp bony spurs, projecting toward the front on the forelegs, and

toward the back on the hind legs. Their hoofs were split into three sections, each of which was armed with a claw.

Thid Yet assisted Vernia to enter the vehicle, then clambered up after her. The drivers shouted to their beasts, and the huge wheel lumbered away.

"Where are they taking her?" Grandon asked San Thoy.

"To the palace, no doubt," the yellow man replied, "where we, too, will be taken shortly."

"If my plan works, I'll go to the palace, but not as a prisoner," Grandon told his two companions. "We will attain at least temporary liberty if you throw off your collars when I raise my right hand, then follow me."

Grandon saw the loot from his camp, and the weapons and accouterments of his Fighting Traveks, carried ashore. Then the door of their prison was flung open and a self-important mojo, accompanied by four guards, all carrying their scarbos in their hands, ordered them out.

They were ushered up a companionway, and on reaching the deck, were forced into a line of yellow men who, laden with their loot, were hurrying ashore.

They had reached the center of the swaying gangplank when Grandon suddenly raised his right hand. Simultaneously the three prisoners threw off the collars which their captors had, up until then, believed to be locked. Before they could act, the Earth-man had turned and dived into the water beneath, swiftly followed by his two companions.

CHAPTER 10

THE PORT OF PERIL

CONFINED in the identical cabin from which she had shortly before been stolen by San Thoy, Vernia hoped against hope that Grandon would find some way to rescue her. But as the pirates sailed southward, day after day, and no word of any kind came from him, hope began to fade.

Day and night, two armed guards were kept constantly before her door, the only exit from her cabin. At first she attempted to question them, but they would not answer. Then she tried quizzing the slave who brought her meals. He was ready enough to converse about her desires in the way of food, but when she tried interrogating him about Grandon or about their destination, he always professed ignorance.

Thus was her mind burdened with double anxiety—the fear that Grandon might be tortured or slain, and the certainty that each day was bringing her nearer to the lascivious monster who had bribed the Huitsenni to capture her. Although no mention of his name had passed the lips of any of the pirates in her presence, she was positive that the instigator of the plot was none other than the pleasure-bloated tyrant, Zanaloth, Torrogo of Mernerum—Zanaloth, at the mere mention of whose name comely maidens would shudder, whose scarlet suite was notorious throughout all Zorovia, and whose subjects with sweethearts, sisters, daughters or wives of more than ordinary beauty lived in constant dread that their loved ones might be summoned to the seraglio of the tyrant.

Her days she spent in gazing out through the small window of her cabin, her nights in restless turning and tossing upon her sleeping-shelf. But a day came when the shutter of her window was closed so that she could not see out. Her cabin door, also, was locked. Evidently, she thought, something was about to take place on or near the ship which the Huitsenni did not wish her to see. A

short time later she heard the noises of the bat-wing sails being lowered and the oars shipped.

For some time she heard only the sound of commands and the splashing of oars. Presently the oars were unshipped and there was the grating shock of the vessel grinding its side against some solid object. Then came the tramp of many feet on the deck.

Shortly thereafter, her door was unlocked and flung open. Thid Yet stood before her. "Come," he said. "We have arrived in Huitsen."

In Huitsen! Then the reason for the closed shutter and locked door was apparent. They had not let her see the concealed entrance to this hidden lair of the yellow pirates because she would not be expected to remain here permanently—because she was to be sold into slavery outside the domains of the Huitsenni.

She stepped out of the cabin. There was nothing else for her to do. Thid Yet led her toward the gangplank and a guard of six pirates fell in behind them. She glanced around, hoping to catch sight of Grandon or Kantar. Concealing, as best she could, her disappointment at not seeing them, she walked across the plank with her captor.

The one-wheeled cart was no novelty to Vernia. She had seen many like it in her own country. But the fearsome, three-horned white beasts that were hitched to it were creatures she had never seen or heard of before.

"Zandars," said Thid Yet, noting her look of surprize. "They make strong beasts of burden and admirable chargers for our warriors to ride. We get them from the White Ibbits, who inhabit the Mountains of Eternal Snow, far to the south. Let me help you."

He assisted her to enter the high cab. The Romojak climbed in with her and the heavy vehicle trundled away. The six guards trotted beside it, three on a side.

Traversing a narrow passageway between two stone warehouses, they emerged on a broad thoroughfare of heavy serali planking like that of which the dock was constructed. The hoofs of the zandars echoed hollowly as from a bridge and the large single wheel of the cart made a sound much like the continuous rolling of thunder. This thoroughfare, like those which crossed it at various intervals, was lined with tall, hive-shaped buildings with oval windows and doorways. Like the warehouses, these buildings were of stone.

Yellow children, all of them naked and bald-headed, scampered from in front of the vehicle and then paused to stare at them with their queer, cat-like eyes. Bald housewives, unclad save for short leathern aprons which depended from their ample waists, paused in their work to gaze at them through oval windows or from the doorsteps of their conical houses. Beside each doorstep, Vernia noticed that a hole had been cut in the planking, and many of the women held lines which hung down into these holes. She could not imagine what they were doing until one female suddenly jerked up a flopping, silvery-scaled fish. She judged from this and the hollow sound of the planking that this section of the city was built over the inland sea.

There were few men about at this time of day, but those lolled against the houses or squatted on the doorsteps, squinting apathetically up at the passing vehicle. The entire hairless, toothless population, male and female, from the tiniest child playing naked in the street to the oldest crone fishing beside her doorstep, mumbled kerra spores and expectorated enormous quantities of the red juice.

The vehicle rapidly drew near to a towering structure which would have made a hundred of any of the lesser buildings around it. Like them, however, it was hive-shaped, and built of stone.

THEY rumbled through an immense oval doorway and halted. Thid Yet clambered down, and assisted Vernia to alight. They were in an enclosed court onto which several oval doors opened. Each doorway was guarded by two soldiers.

"This is the palace of Yin Yin, Rogo of Huitsen," said Thid Yet. "He has commanded that you be brought into his presence before we take you to our rendezvous with Zan——" He checked himself abruptly, and a look of vexation crossed his greasy features, as if he had unthinkingly mentioned some forbidden thing.

"Whether you finish the name or leave it unspoken does not matter," said Vernia. "I have known all along that the man who offered your Rogo such a fabulous sum for me that he dared the wrath of the mighty fighter who is my husband, and the power of unbeaten Reabon, to abduct me, could be none other than Zanaloth of Mernerum."

"After all, what does it matter, Zanaloth or another? You will know soon enough, in any event. But come. His Majesty is expecting you, and may grow impatient."

Thid Yet conducted her through the nearest doorway, the six pirates falling in behind them, and the two guards saluting the Romojak as they entered. It led onto a gently sloping ramp which spiraled upward. The ramp was paved with black stone dotted with golden studs, which prevented the sandals of climbers from slipping as they ascended. At intervals of about fifty feet on either side were set ornate golden vessels half filled with sand. Even had Thid Yet not utilized these freely on their way up, Vernia would have recognized their purpose by the fact that the sand was stained with spots of kerra juice.

After a considerable climb they came to a level passageway which led them to a large oval doorway hung with scarlet curtains and guarded by two yellow warriors. The guards saluted smartly at sight of the Romojak with his prisoner, and drew back the scarlet hangings.

Vernia was ushered into a circular room about two hundred feet in diameter, and so tremendously high that it had the appearance of a shaft, rather than a room. Its walls were of iridescent crystal blocks which reflected in many lovely hues the light that entered through four immense oval windows set in the top of the conical dome. At intervals of about fifteen feet it was circled by narrow balconies, the grille-work of which was plated with gold and powdered with sparkling jewels. Behind the balconies many oval doorways led to apartments on the various levels. On these balconies were seated several hundred women and children, evidently members of the royal household. The floor was a single immense mirror which reflected every detail so clearly and faithfully that when Vernia looked down, it seemed that she was standing over a shaft of a depth equal to the height of the one which towered above her.

Vernia was led to the center of this magnificent hall where a circular divan, cut from a single block of clear crystal, supported a scarlet cushion at a height of about four feet above the floor. Squatting, cross-legged, in the middle of this cushion was an extremely corpulent yellow man, who, except for the scarlet cinc-

ture about his loins, was clad entirely in jewelry. Jewels blazed from the rings which all but concealed his pudgy fingers and toes, and flashed from his golden anklets, bracelets, armlets, and necklaces. Two immense diamonds stretched the lobes of his ears almost to his shoulders and a large ruby sparkled on each of his broad nostrils. His bald head was the only unadorned part of his anatomy, but shone as brightly as if it, too, had been burnished by the royal lapidary.

Behind the throne stood two muscular guards, each leaning on a huge, two-handed scarbo that reached from the floor to his chin. And back of these in a semi-circle were ranged purple-clad nobles and courtiers, beside each of which stood a jar of sand. At each side of the throne stood six slave-girls. Two held golden, jewel-encrusted cuspidors which the one at the right or the left extended, depending on which way the monarch turned his head when he wished to expectorate. Other girls bore trays of newly opened kerra pods, ready for chewing, and still others, jeweled cups and pots of kova which were kept hot by small aromatic oil lamps burning beneath them. And a young girl, scarcely more than half grown, held a bundle of scarlet napkins, with one of which she wiped the royal chins from time to time—there were four of them—then passed the soiled cloths to an attendant.

As Thid Yet came before the throne with his beautiful prisoner, he bowed low with right hand extended palm downward, the universal Zorovian salute to royalty. Then he humbly waited for the ruler to speak.

Vernia, however, remained proudly erect, returning the appraising look of the creature on the throne with one of withering disdain.

YIN YIN, Rogo of Huitsen, spat into the jeweled cuspidor tendered by the girl at his right, submitted to having his multiple chins wiped, and then turned his cat-like eyes on his Romojak.

"Are you positive that this slender beauty, just budded into womanhood, is the Torroga of Reabon?" he asked.

"I am positive, Majesty," the Romojak replied. "She answers every description, and wears the scarlet and insignia of her imperial house."

Yin Yin turned to a purple-clad noble who stood near at hand.

"Fetch the painting," he commanded.

The man sped away and vanished through one of the numerous doorways, to return a moment later followed by two slaves who bore a life-size portrait of Vernia. She instantly recognized it as having been taken from one of her war vessels, all of which carried such paintings before which every sailor and officer bowed each morning in token of his loyalty and submission to his imperial ruler.

Yin Yin ordered the painting set up a little to one side, then gazed alternately at the portrait and the living original who stood before him, for some time.

Presently he said: "It is indeed Vernia of Reabon, for she is, if anything, more beautiful than her picture. You have done well, Thid Yet. For this we reward you with a thousand kantols of land and a thousand keds of gold. We are just."

"Yin Yin, Rogo of Huitsen, is the fountainhead of justice," intoned the courtiers.

"May it please Your Majesty, I also captured her husband, the mighty fighter known as 'Grandon of Terra'," said Thid Yet, proudly.

"So I have heard," replied the monarch. "For this deed we reward you with a hundred strong slaves to work your land. We are just."

"Yin Yin, Rogo of Huitsen, is the living source of justice," chorused the courtiers.

"I have heard, also," continued Yin Yin, "that Grandon of Terra has escaped."

Thid Yet looked dumfounded, but at this news Vernia's heart gave a great leap of joy.

"He escaped," the Rogo went on, "before he reached the dock. Hence you, and you alone, are responsible. For this carelessness we commend you to the expert offices of our headsman." One of the guards behind the throne here shouldered his great, two-handed scarbo and stepped forward, but the Rogo held up his hand. "Wait, Ez Bin," he commanded. "Be not so impetuous." He turned again to Thid Yet. "If you bring me not Grandon of Terra before ten days have passed, then submit your neck to Ez Bin. We are just, but we are merciful."

"Both just and merciful is Yin Yin, Rogo of Huitsen," cried the courtiers.

The monarch moved a finger. Ez Bin returned to his post. He moved another finger. Two of the six guards who had followed Thid Yet and Vernia stepped up beside the Romojak. Then the three bowed low before the throne with right hands extended palms downward, and wheeling, left the room.

Yin Yin, meanwhile, refreshed himself with a cup of steaming kova and stuffed his mouth with fresh kerra spores. He mumbled them for some time in silence, ogling Vernia the while, then spat and said: "We do not wonder that a certain torrogo, who shall be nameless, offered us the price of an empire for you. You are more than worth it."

"I care not for your compliments, you yellow filth," retorted Vernia, spiritedly.

"Nor we for your insults, my little beauty," replied Yin Yin. "You are now but a chattel, a rather spirited chattel to be sure, a regular she-marmelot of a chattel, but we like you that way. We have subdued many such."

"To your everlasting dishonor and their endless shame."

Yin Yin grinned. "That is a point on which you will find many who will disagree with you. We will not argue it. We never argue, for argument with us is always futile. It would be unfair for us to argue." He turned to the noble who had brought him the picture. "Let us see our contract with—with this nameless torrogo," he commanded.

"Name Zanaloth of Mernerum, or keep him nameless. It is all one to me," said Vernia.

"Who told you that?" he asked, sharply.

"You could never guess, and I shall never tell you," replied Vernia, defiantly.

"Ah well. It doesn't matter. You will know soon enough." He took a scroll which the noble extended to him and perused it for some time. "Hum. It is as I thought. This contract says we shall meet before the harbor of the Island of the Valkars, one ship of his and one of ours, on the morning of the fourteenth day of the ninth endir in the four thousand and tenth year of Thorth. He will have, on the day previous, landed the slaves and treasure on the island, where the fear of the Valkars will prevent the former attempting to escape beyond the lines of the few guards who will be left to defend them.

"When our commander has satisfied himself that the slaves and treasure agreed upon have been left on the island, he will deliver to the Torrogo of Mernerum, or his agent, the person of Her Imperial Majesty, Vernia of Reabon.

"It does not say 'unharmed', nor is there anything in this contract to prevent our taking this Vernia of Reabon to be our handmaiden until such time as it may be necessary for her to sail for the rendezvous with Zanaloth."

He moved a finger, and two of the four guards who stood behind Vernia stepped up beside her.

"Take her to the seraglio," he commanded, "and tell Ufa to prepare her this night for the royal visit; for it may be that we will honor her with the light of our presence. We are generous."

"His Majesty, Yin Yin, Rogo of Huitsen, is most generous," chorused the courtiers, as Vernia, her heart sinking within her, was led away.

Swimming among the pilings that support the wooden streets of Huitsen, Grandon and his companions meet with strange adventures as the Earthman tries to reach his stolen bride. But Y in Y in is all-powerful here, and is determined that the beautiful Vernia shall be his, before he sells her to Zanaloth of Mernerum for the price of an empire. A terrific conflict ensues. Don't fail to read it in the January issue of WEIRD TALES, on sale December 1st.

The Door to Yesterday

(Continued from page 748)

senger reappeared outside her bedroom window and dropped the bat wing at her feet.

"That bat wing, he was to the Voodooist what the signal of distress is to the Master Mason or the fiery cross is to a member of a Scottish clan. It is a summons which could not be denied. By no means; no, indeed.

"We saw her serve *Ayida Oueddo's* altar, we saw her when she had been apprehended, we saw her led to execution. Ha, and did we not also see her single out your ancestor and hurl her dying curse at him? Did not she say: 'As I am crushed this day, so shall you and yours be crushed by my *ouanga*'? But certainly.

"*Ouanga* in their *patois* is a most elastic term. There is no literal translation for it; vaguely, it means the same as 'medicine' when used by the Red Indian, or 'magic' when spoken of by the Black African, or 'devil-devil' when used by natives of the South Sea islands. Define it accurately we can not; understand it we can. It is the working, as of a charm, through some unknown superphysical agency.

"*Eh bien,* did it not work? I shall say as much. Three of your family died most horribly, with their bones crushed, even as were that poor young girl's on that dreadful day of execution so long ago. Only by the mercy of heaven and the cleverness of Jules de Grandin are you alive tonight, and not all crushed to death, *Monsieur.*"

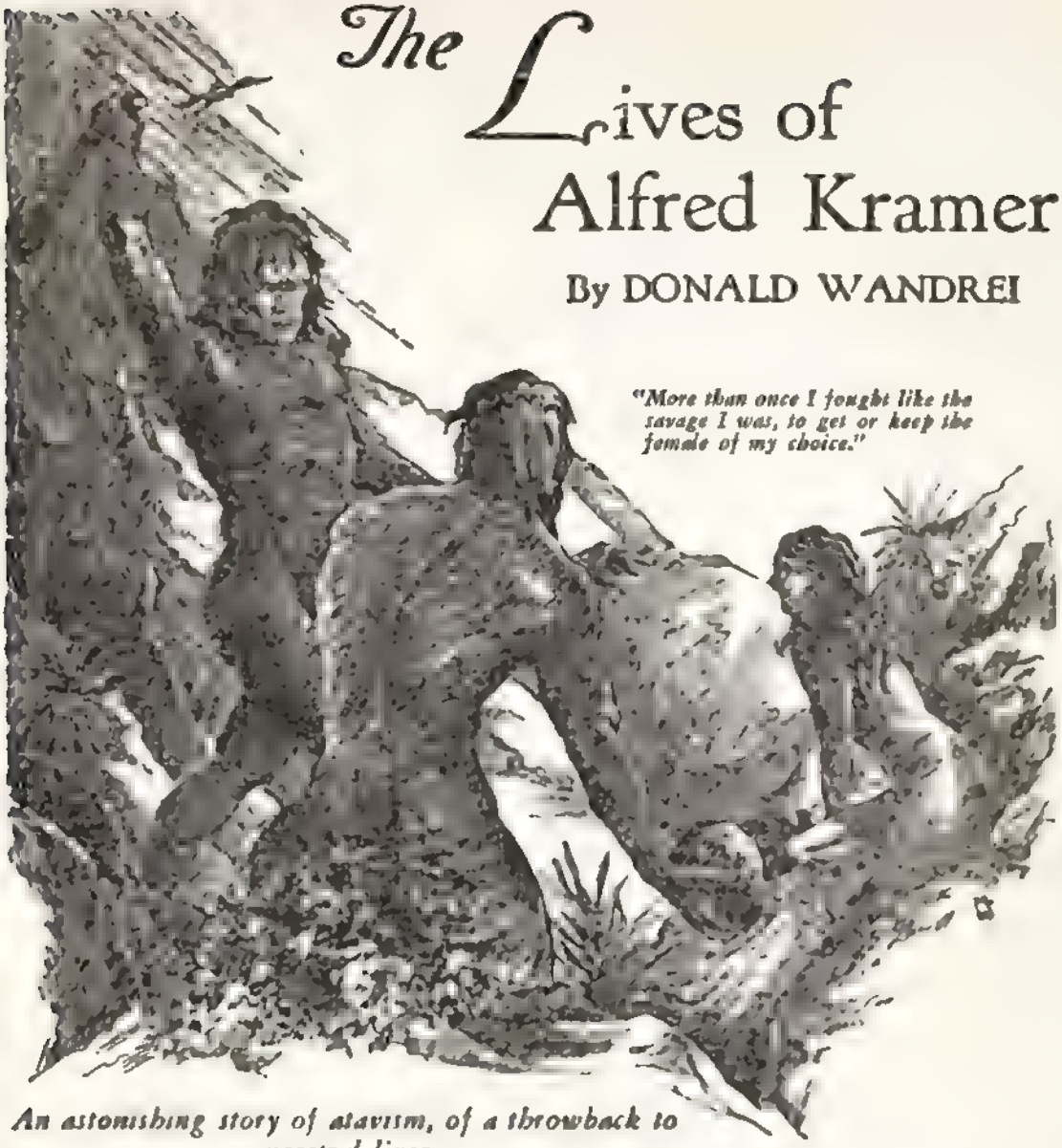
"But——" I began.

" 'But' be grilled upon hell's hottest griddle," cut in Jules de Grandin. "I thirst. *Cordieu,* Sahara at its dryest is as the rolling billows of the great Atlantic compared to my poor throat, my friend.

"*Garçon, quatre cognacs—tout vite; s'il vous plait!*"

The Lives of Alfred Kramer

By DONALD WANDREI



"More than once I fought like the savage I was, to get or keep the female of my choice."

An astonishing story of atavism, of a throwback to ancestral lives

THOUGH my train did not pull out till eleven p. m., I had boarded it at ten. While the berths were being made up I strolled around. There were few passengers this early in the week. Indeed, when I walked back and took a seat in the smoking-car, I noticed but one other occupant. To my casual glance, he appeared singularly repulsive. His grayish face, an immobile setness of expression, burning black eyes in which no pupil was visible, his gloved hands folded stiffly in his lap, all combined to give me an immediate dislike.

I paid no further attention to him during the quarter of an hour or so that I sat smoking. Several times, however, I had an impression that he was intently watching me.

When I arose and began to walk toward my berth, I had an equally vivid impression that he addressed some remark to me in a low and extraordinarily

husky voice just as I was passing him. So inaudible was his voice and so marked my aversion that I pretended I had not heard and continued on my way.

Dismissing the incident from mind, I prepared for slumber. A variety of noises kept me awake. I heard brakemen call, the train pull out, its wheels clack rhythmically.

An hour later I was still tossing restlessly.

At about twelve-thirty I gave up my futile effort to sleep, climbed from my berth, and slipped on a dressing-gown. Cigar in hand, I again made my way back to the smoking-car. Its lone occupant had evidently not moved, for he was still sitting where I last saw him. I did not notice his lips move, but plainly this time I heard his abominable husky voice.

"Won't you join me for a few miles?" it said. "I am an invalid, you see."

Perhaps his appeal for sympathy touched me, or perhaps his obvious loneliness. At any rate, I suppressed my unpleasant reaction to his physical appearance and dropped into the chair opposite him.

I made some reference to my unconventional garb, and idly remarked, "I thought I'd have another smoke. Sleep was impossible."

"Yes," he responded, "there are times when one would like to sleep but can not. It is worse," he added cryptically, "when one would prefer to remain awake, but can not."

A bit puzzled, I waited for him to continue.

"I have not slept for three nights," he volunteered.

"Indeed? I am sorry if your illness prevents you from sleeping," I said politely.

"No, it is not that. My indisposition is of such a nature that slumber is dangerous. I have kept myself awake by stimulants. And the long night hours are monotonous when one is alone."

Casual though our conversation was thus far, and despite my friendly resolve, I had been becoming more uneasy. There was a kind of psychic chill in the air which early autumn could not entirely account for. My companion's repellent aspect was hardly modified by the soft lights around us. For all the expression on his grayish face, an automaton or ventriloquist might have been speaking. No muscular change had yet livened his countenance, his lips had made no perceptible movement. His unrelaxing gloved hands, the unnatural shine of his black eyes, and his rigid carriage were as disquieting at close range as they had been at a distance. Nor could I accustom myself to the throaty degeneracy of his speech. About his person there was in addition an odor that bothered me. It was quite indefinable, but had an element of the beast in it, and of corruption, and stagnant sea-water, and mildew.

I now noticed what had hitherto escaped me, that a pile of books lay beside him. The topmost was Strindmann's monograph, *Racial Memory in Dreams.* Other books underneath it dealt with abnormal psychology.

"Are you a student of psychology?" I asked.

"To some extent, yes, but I am more interested in dreams. You see, I have been troubled by nightmares for some time. I am on my way to Vienna to place myself under Strindmann's care.

"Allow me to introduce myself: I am Alfred Kramer."

"And I am Wallace Forbes. Your dreams must be rather upsetting to necessitate a trip half-way around the world."

I, who never dream, had always been

fascinated by that phenomenon in other people. Kramer himself must have desired sympathetic ears to receive his story, because, hesitantly at first, then more directly and swiftly, he began to tell his narrative.

"From early childhood," he commenced, "I was inquisitive into the world around me. I seem to have been born with a scientific and inventive bent. At the same time I was a dreamy child. My nights were vivid with a constant stream of images. Sometimes these were pleasant, often they were terrifying. I saw scenes and had strange experiences that I could not explain on the basis of anything I had read, or witnessed, or heard.

"Because of these visions I acquired a profound interest in brain processes as I grew older. My studies dealt with dream psychology, racial memory, and mental inheritances.

"A CERTAIN dream kept recurring over a period of years: I stood in the midst of a somber glade. All around rose the vast and evil boles of monstrous trees. Long shadows lay athwart the sere grass of autumn at my feet. There were indistinct figures at a little distance which harmonized curiously with the colossal trees. They were watching me intently. In my hand I held a wicked sacrificial knife. Before me was a great stone altar, stained with the blood of countless victims. It stood by the hugest of the trees, and it had a slanting trough so that the spilled blood would water those gnarled roots. A naked young girl of goddess-like beauty lay upon this altar. Her gray eyes regarded me with a baffling mixture of religious ecstasy, terror, and love, as I slowly raised the knife to plunge it into her breast.

"Time after time that vision came to me as clearly as an episode from life. But I never dreamed of what preceded the scene, nor did I know what followed.

"Out of my wish to know the full episode, and from my belief that many dreams were memories of past events, I conceived a hypothesis. The unbroken stream of life had descended from parents to children throughout the ages. Why might not major experiences have been so deeply impressed upon the brain that they too were inherited? Perhaps they were latent, awaiting only a magic touch to awaken them into reconstructed pictures. If this were true, possibly it would account for hitherto unexplained dreams. My own persistent nightmare was like an inherited image, surviving in me, of some impressive episode in the life of a long-dead ancestor.

"Under proper conditions, why shouldn't it be possible to release these ancestral adventures?

"Fascinated by the thought, I plunged into years of labor. Mental therapy, psychiatry, brain surgery became my special studies. I exhausted all sources of information on every phase of the brain, in health and disease, infancy and maturity, life and death. I made elaborate investigations into physiology, the nervous system, motor stimuli, 'why the wheels go round,' in other words. I began a thorough and detailed research into the structure, nature, function, purpose, and action of brain cells.

"Behind my wild idea and its resulting intense activity was a coldly logical plan. If past events could be retained in memory by descendants, they would be recorded somewhere in the brain itself. And among its component parts the source most likely to offer fruitful results was the cells. Of these there are several millions, a vast majority of which seem never to be used. In fact, the average human being requires the services of

only a few thousand cells during his lifetime. The remaining cells apparently are capable of storing up facts but simply are not called on except by individuals who pursue knowledge inexhaustibly. It was my belief that this enormous number of unused cells retained, but ever so slightly, impressions of the dominant incidents which had affected the lives of all one's forebears.

"I next supposed that when a cell was required to store away a fact or event in one's life, its latent memory of ancestral experience was obliterated. But if it were not used, the latent memory continued to exist, sometimes never to be realized, sometimes, however, to flash forth vividly in sleep or subconscious dreams.

"For a long time I pursued a wrong path. I thought that the memory-impressions made a physical change in the cells, just as a particle of metal changes in shape when you strike it violently: and that all I needed to do was to invent some sort of sensitive electric device which would tap these cells by means of their specific differences.

"Vain delusion! I wasted two precious years pursuing a ghost, as it were.

"And like many another person who deals with complexities, I found simplicity the keynote to my riddle. It was in 1931, not long after the cosmic ray was discovered and the electrogenetic theory of life propounded, that a brilliant idea occurred to me. You are acquainted with this theory? Its assertion that the human system is somewhat like a battery, and that what we call life lasts while a positive-negative interaction of electricity continues, while death is the complete cessation of that activity? Well, the thought came to me that by increasing this electrical energy of the body, and more particularly by heightening this activity in the brain, each cell might release its individual retained fact or ancestral memory. Recent impressions, being nearer and therefore stronger, would be unloosed first; but by gradually building up activity, older and yet older events ought to permit of resurrection.

"I worked with new energy. Light, wave-lengths, rays occupied my attention. Weird and intricate machinery accumulated in my laboratory.

"And now at last I began to feel success approaching with my isolation of the Kappa-ray. I found it in minute quantities in the bright sunshine that poured down, found too that it directly supplied human beings with much of that electrical energy which gave them life.

"I toiled feverishly until I succeeded in crossing my last barrier. I constructed a sort of Kappa-battery that would isolate from sunshine and store up in concentrated form the Kappa-ray! Day after day, as my black metal box stood in the open glare of the sun, charging itself with precious invisible stuff, I watched it, fondly, jealously. I would have killed any one who chanced to come upon it.

"Then came that evening when its capacity was reached. Carefully I closed it and carried it to my quarters as gently as if it were nitroglycerin. Worn out and prematurely aged from my years of intense labor, tired in body yet wonderfully excited in spirit, I lay down on my bed with the black box beside me.

"With a strangely steady hand I reached out and opened its shutter and pressed a switch.

"An invisible warm radiance flowed and flooded and poured into me. My head swam with an indescribable nausea, a kind of opiate thickness combined with an increasingly rapid surge of extraordinarily lucid thoughts. My mind seemed to be working faster and clearer than it

ever had before. But at the same time, that soothing warmth stole pleasantly over me. Lest there be danger, I extended my arm and closed the box.

"Almost instantaneously I slept.

"A panic-stricken mob, fleeing in terror, bore me along in its mad flight. I fought and struggled to prevent myself from being crushed to death. A confused roar deafened my ears. Cries of racing figures, groans of injured and dying men, crackle of flame and howl of wind blended into a hideous noise. Buildings appeared to speed by me as I forged ahead. I knew I must be in some large city.

"MY BURSTING lungs gasped for clean air but only drew in acrid smoke. The sky glowed redly, flame-shot darkness swirled around me, from behind came the glare of a vast conflagration. I saw swaths of fire leap from building to building on the wings of a stiff wind. Clouds of smoke billowed up, drifted upon us, choked the lungs of refugees. Ever and again, some poor devil fell, and the sheeted flame raced inexorably over him.

"A lumbering brute crashed into me. I cursed savagely and plunged after him. He tripped. I saw him no more. A frail woman with two children, crying as the mob jostled past her, leaned helplessly against a door-stoop. I caught her in one arm and swung her along with me, the children folded to her. And all these people were dressed in the fashion of a full half-century ago!

"We struggled onward in the midst of this livid nightmare. The city's heart was an inferno, a raging furnace.

"But now we were approaching outskirts and less thickly populated districts. Gradually we forged ahead. Smoke and blistering heat still smote us, but the danger region lay farther behind.

"Then, abruptly, the scene changed.

"I was at a ship's wheel. Under full sail we scudded along at a fast clip. Stretching to every horizon, with no land visible anywhere, a white-capped sea surged under a strong trade-wind. The sun poured warmly from a sky in which only a few clouds floated high.

"With terrifying suddenness came a cry from the lookout.

" *'Derelict dead ahead!'*

"I swung the wheel mightily. The ship skewed. Crash! She quivered a moment, began to sink. I saw a waterlogged hulk, black, submerged, hover by our ripped bow. There was a pandemonium of leaping men, despairing shouts where boats fouled in their davits or capsized when badly launched, a bitter fight for positions in those that remained. One went down, overloaded. Another was drawn by suction and followed our ship as she sank.

"At the first shock I tore my clothing off and dived far overboard, swimming rapidly to escape the deadly suction. I was hauled aboard one of two boats that survived. In all there were eleven men left out of thirty-two.

"Then came tragedy in the days that ensued as thirst, starvation, and a blazing sun took their toll. We knew of no land closer than five hundred miles. Some time during our second night adrift, the two boats became separated.

"Six survivors had manned our boat to begin with. At the end of a week we were four. This number was reduced to three on our tenth day afloat when Olaf went mad from drinking salt water and leaped overboard. That left Petri, Andrews, and myself. I think Petri recklessly committed suicide rather than suffer a lingering death of torment, but I

can not be sure, for I became delirious on the twelfth day.

"I returned to my senses strangely refreshed. A rain squall had evidently struck and passed. I greedily lapped up warm, fresh water from the boat's bottom and revived still more. I noticed that only one of my companions was now left—and he had been dead for I know not how long. I heaved his body overboard.

"Two days later a little palm-fringed island came in sight. With what desperate anxiety I watched it grow larger, and how eagerly I stumbled ashore to drag myself feebly up its beach! I was saved! Saved! And without warning the scene vanished.

"Then followed a couple of less interesting dreams with whose details I will not bother to tell.

"When I at length awakened at dawn, I could scarcely keep calm because of the excitement that possessed me. Columbus could not have been more thrilled when he discovered a new continent. I had made a discovery that might open up unguessable stores of knowledge to mankind, or that might clarify many obscure and forgotten pages of history. Yet I had no intention of announcing it publicly until I had first explored for myself in full its potentialities. I hoped that I would sooner or later have a complete re-presentation of that persistent but fragmentary vision which I alluded to earlier. I speculated on what fascinating episodes from ancestral life might present themselves as I continued using the Kappa-ray. For insofar as I could tell, it left no ill effects. Indeed, I felt unusually energetic, my thoughts came with exceptional clarity.

"That day I spent much of my time obtaining books from libraries and dealers. These were mainly works on genealogy, history, costume, antiquities, biography, and sciences.

"I pored over these till late at night. Two items rewarded a tedious search. One brief record told how my father had escaped in his youth from the great fire of Chicago. The second excerpt, which I ran across in Cooper's *Maritime Disasters,* narrated that a whaler, the *Nancy R.,* disappeared in the South Seas, 1809 A. D.; and that her fate was not learned until two years later when the clipper *Seagull,* anchoring for repairs at an atoll southwest of Keaua, found the sole survivor of that tragedy, my grandfather, who had been living there ever since.

"I was happy as a child over this verification of my theory, even though I had strained my eyes by such intensive research. More than satisfied with my achievement, I again opened the Kappa-ray battery and felt its radiant-soporific energy pour through my head just before sleep came to me.

"1638. They were ready to burn a condemned witch in England. A wizened, half-demented old woman, she was already tied to the stake. A crowd of stupid faces and stern persecutors ringed her in. I had somehow been drawn there but now looked at her with compassion in my eyes and would have turned away, sick to my heart, if I could. Any movement was difficult, wedged in tightly as I was.

"A vicious mob shout arose as the executioner advanced, torch in hand. Above that babel the old woman's voice suddenly ascended.

" 'Innocent! I am innocent!' she croaked. 'Burn me, will you? May your heart turn to the stone that it is!'

"A startled expression came into the executioner's eyes. He paused in his stride, clutched his breast, plunged to earth dead before he struck.

"Supernatural fear laid an absolute quiet on the crowd. One of the witch's relentless tormenters, bolder than his associates, walked forward and picked up the fallen torch.

" 'Sorceress!' he cried. 'Prepare to meet thy God and be sentenced to eternal damnation!' And he flung the torch among the faggots heaped around her. It caught, a thin flame sprang up and raced from stick to stick.

" 'Fools! Fools!' the old crone cursed. 'May the vengeance of God and Satan, for this day's work, pursue every one—*except you!*' And she raised a withered hand toward me. 'Only you have pity—may you and your descendants be blessed, even unto the tenth generation. But after the tenth generation, beware! *We shall meet again, yea, three hundred years hence, and you will tell me you remember!*'

"Without willing it, I cried, 'I will remember!'—and awoke to hear my own voice, '*remember—remember,*' echo hollowly in my room and die away. I tossed fitfully, dropped into a sound sleep."

But this account is growing longer than I intended. I must omit many details, fascinating though they would be. Flying miles accompanied flying minutes while I listened spellbound to Kramer's husky voice, and looked into his fever-bright eyes, and wondered how he managed to speak with any distinctness when his lips had not yet visibly moved. His story flowed on—or shall I say continued backward?—through Henry the Eighth's court, the Spanish Inquisition, Constantinople at its fall, Paris of Villon's day, the Norman conquest, weaving its way through earlier and yet earlier centuries.

"So I finally came to my puzzling dream," Kramer went on. "I do not know exactly what year it was, but from its place in my sleep-atavism, I would guess the Fifth or Sixth Century.

"Autumn had come. Dead leaves and withered grass marked the dying year. I was a high priest among the Druids. Each year, upon the last evening of fall, we sacrificed our loveliest virgin to the forest god so that her blood would appease him and cause him to let our sacred trees grow green again when spring returned. I, as high priest, must offer the sacrifice—and she whom they had chosen was Neridh, beloved of my heart.

"I had done everything in my power to save Neridh, until they had grown suspicious. One desperate hope of success remained, but the ritual had been chanted, Neridh lay upon the altar, and a semicircle of dark faces watched me from all around this woodland glade. I dragged out my invocation and supplication. The sun sank lower, and shadows crept longer on blown leaves and brown grass.

"There could be no further delay. Sacrifices must be made before sunset. I raised my arm slowly and held the knife high, poised for its downward plunge into my beloved's heart. Anguish, terror, love, resignation struggled for expression on her face. Already the sun's rim was dropping, and——

"Somewhere afar a tree gave forth a sharp crack. Fear leaped into those eyes that watched me. I heard a heavy groan, a series of sounds from rending boughs, then a booming crash as a giant tree toppled.

" 'The wood-spirit is angry!' I shouted. 'Our sacrifice displeases him! To the Great Hill, fly! and witness the evidence of his wrath!'

"Terror gripped the Druids, they melted away like ghosts. I knew what they would find—a forest monarch half chopped in two, and a slow fire that had

eaten its way in. My work, my secret efforts to rescue Neridh were triumphant.

"I bent over and slashed her bonds. Swiftly but gently I set her on her feet.

" 'Follow me, there is not a moment to lose!' I whispered. 'Make haste before they return!'

"Hand in hand down the endless forest aisles we raced. Neridh ran like a nymph, her graceful body flashing white among the shadows. Night drew on, and I saw her shiver with the chill of early evening. So intent had I been on saving her that I had forgotten her lack of raiment. I unloosed my outer robe, and scarcely pausing in my stride threw it around her as we sped onward. She gave me a quick glance of pleasure and clutched the warm ceremonial garment close to her.

"And so, deeper and deeper into the vast forest, through thickening darkness, by trails that only I knew, we ran toward safety, weaving our way past immemorial oaks and gigantic boles that had stood even before the coming of our people.

"There my dream ended. I can merely surmise that we escaped into the fastnesses of that forest. There too, since I had discovered what I sought, I could have ended my experiment and ceased energizing myself with Kappa-rays. Such self-denial was beyond either my will or my desire. I was caught in a maelstrom, farther goals lured me on, I succumbed to a magnetic spell which my own imagination had woven. How much more could I learn of what my forebears had lived? I wanted to carry my experiment to its limit. Night after night I therefore utilized the Kappa-ray in pursuit of those adventures which a part of me had long ago experienced.

"A YEAR that I do not dare to guess. I must have been a merchant, and I had gone on some annual trip to a town far from my native land. It was a rambling town, a town of crowded, connected little clay and stone houses. It lay beneath the glare of a scorching sun, and farther out the shifting desert dunes melted into bleak, red wastelands. Its men were swarthy, bearded. They wore long and flowing robes and spoke a language that I could understand but little.

"As I walked down the narrow streets, I heard a sudden hubbub above the usual street cries. When I came to a sharp curve that had interrupted my view I halted abruptly. There was a crowd of the curious, the holy, rich and poor alike, following a stranger who paced along the sunbaked street. He was simply clad. On his face was an expression of such glory, and in his eyes a light of so divine a purity, that my first instinct was to recoil in humility. He was radiant, and the very air about his head seemed luminous with a light I have never seen elsewhere. Then I felt a great serenity come upon me, and my spirit was lifted out of me, cleansed as if I had bathed in some mystical, immortal essence.

"There came a woman who flung herself at the feet of the stranger. Her left hand was hooked like a claw, and splotched with ominous patches of white. The fingers of her right hand were withered away, and her face was disfigured. The crowd shrank back, muttering 'Unclean! Unclean!' But the woman heeded them not and pleaded to the stranger with sorrowing eyes.

"He paused. I saw an expression of infinite pity and compassion shine through his eyes. I was reverent in the presence of ineffable beauty and transcendent wonder.

"The stranger stretched out his arm, and blessed the woman in a voice melodious as distant bells. I saw the claw-shaped hand become firm and rosy, the

withered arm fill out to its former symmetry, the mutilated face glow with the happiness of restored health.

"The stranger continued on his way. The woman transfigured knelt in the dust. . . .

"Day after day I kept drawing aside the veil of oblivion. Night upon night I lived again in my dreams my previous lives and ventured still farther back through vanished years. I saw Phryne pose for Praxiteles at Athens in 338 B. C. when the Aphrodite of Cnidos was taking immortal form under his hands. In Egypt I witnessed the wakening of a mummy from its tomb of ten centuries, and saw the doubtful Egyptian gods arise from crypts older than civilization. I dwelt at a lamasery near Tibet when all my future was foretold to me by priests of a forgotten cult. And ever I pursued my ancestral life backward through mounting ages. There came a night whose dream no history records, the memory of an event that must have occurred more than ten thousand years B. C.

"My lives had turned away from Asia and gone westward, beyond Egypt, beyond Greece, beyond all Europe, to a vast island or little continent far out in the wastes of the Atlantic. It was a fertile country, a land of mists and sunshine, whose people were happy in the unbroken advance of their civilization. In bays by the murmuring sea, and on slopes of the central hills, golden spires rose high above cities of white and black marble. This continent was a world by itself. There were legends of lands that lay far east from which the ancestors of these inhabitants had come, and there were occasional voyages to nearer countries westward. But they were an indolent race, safe from attack, undisturbed by strife, living in plenty, and rarely venturing afar since there was no need to.

"SO THE fruitful years marched by, and now there came to this island kingdom the rumor of approaching disaster. In Ixenor, capital of Atlantis, Lekti, high priest of the sun-worshippers, made a prophecy of doom.

" 'Our god is angry. The sun shall fail above Atlantis.'

"What did this strange forecast mean? The Atlanteans looked at their sun-god smiling high in the heavens and could not understand. They asked of Lekti that he interpret the warning, or tell them how to appease Elik-Ra, god of the sun. But Lekti had spoken, and answered that he could only receive the message of Elik-Ra and that it was not for him to explain.

" 'The sun shall fail above Atlantis.' A hundred virgins were sacrificed with prayers and supplications for mercy to Elik-Ra. The foundations of a great new temple facing east were laid. Days passed and there was no sign that the prophecy would come true. Gradually the Atlanteans regained their faith, and went about their usual tasks again, and believed that their sacrifice of a hundred virgins had satisfied Elik-Ra. Even the prophecy began to fade from their minds, and no one quite remembered why another temple was being erected.

"But superstitious fear had taken root in my heart. I felt that words of warning, however obscure, should be heeded. There was a legend that fertile hot countries lay far east of Atlantis, beyond where any of us living had gone, whence our ancient fathers were supposed to have come and where the home of the sun-god himself was said to be. I reasoned that some terrible menace might be threatening Atlantis the golden, while

the gods bided their time. And if Elik-Ra was really angry, I could either save myself by fleeing westward, or take an offering with me and strike out east to seek the god's home across the great sea.

"I set to work and had a large new galley built for me. When the inhabitants of Atlantis heard of my undertaking, a few thought my mission could be successful, some said I was foolhardy, but the majority mocked, saying that I was mad or presumptuous since Elik-Ra had been appeased by the sacrifice of the hundred virgins. Their scorn raised momentary doubts in my mind, but I went ahead with my plans.

"Thus there came a day when sixteen slaves took their places at the sweep-oars and we set off across dark waters to seek legendary lands of the rising sun. My galley had one mast whose sail could be used in emergency or when the crew was exhausted. There was a great store of provisions aboard, and as much wealth as I owned. Beside me in silver chains lay the sacrifice I intended to offer Elik-Ra when the time came: a young girl, lovely as the fading spires of Ixenor, and with red-gold hair that flamed like the setting sun.

"We had left Atlantis at dawn. Hardly a breeze stirred. The ocean heaved undulantly in slow, sinister swells. By noon we were entering that trackless wilderness of waters where no living man had penetrated. Far behind, my island kingdom, the only land I knew, dwindled toward the horizon, becoming dream-like and misty and unreal.

"And now as the oars pulled rhythmically a strange thing happened. The waters around us changed from heavy green to a complete and frightful black. Thousands upon thousands of dead fish floated to their surface, whales, tarpon, swordfish, octopi, sailfish, and a dozen other varieties of monsters of the deep such as had never been seen, all dead. Bubbles oozed out, vapor and wisps of steam drifted up. The sea boiled with a vast and nauseating motion. All in one instant Atlantis vanished from the horizon as the ocean reclaimed its own.

" 'The sun shall fail above Atlantis.'

"To me alone was given understanding of the prophecy, unless my slaves remembered. Blind terror had come upon them, and they shouted wildly. I followed the direction of their eyes. From sunken Atlantis a colossal, a mountainous plateau of water extending across the whole horizon hurtled toward us. We saw it coming and we were helpless. We saw it tower overhead and engulf our galley as if it were a fleck of sand. Something bumped me and I grabbed it unthinkingly. An infinite roaring deafened my ears, I was sucked under and flung violently ahead, furious forces raged everywhere. I crashed into something else, hung on, half-drowned pulled myself and my burden up. A freak of the great wave had righted my galley. With two feet of water in its bottom it raced along with the sea-wall. Not one of the sixteen slaves had been saved, only myself and Teoctel, the flame-haired, who had been thrown against me when we capsized, were left of all the millions that had dwelt in Atlantis. . . .

"I DREAMED again, in search of my ancestral lives, and for many nights my visions became increasingly barbaric. I wandered through hills in what is now Spain, where swart people dwelt in caves. I fought a woolly rhinoceros in the Balkans, ruled a tribe of blond giants in the Rhine valley. Time and again I brought down my prey with primitive weapons, or even made my kill with only my bare hands and sharp teeth. More than once

I fought, like the savage I was, to get or to keep the female of my choice.

"When the fire people discovered again the lost art of building a fire, it was I who found that meat improved by being burnt. Then the great cold and the field of ice crept down from the north, and my lives were passed in a strange warm country far to the south where my tribe had fled. And always the faces around me became more bestial, the marks of civilization fewer, until finally the only law was the law of one's strength.

"There, more than fifty thousand years ago, I halted my dreams. Did I say halted them? No, that is not quite true.

"For a week I had been feverishly writing my observations during the daytime, and poring over piles of books in order to localize in time and place the substance of my released memories. I begrudged the moments necessary for eating; it was many days since I had shaven or paid any attention to myself.

"But, as I said, my visions were becoming more savage, primitive, less varied the farther back I went. My initial excitement had begun to wear off, and on this morning, despite a certain heaviness that appeared to possess me, I felt the need of attending to my long-neglected personal appearance.

"When I bent over to draw the water for my tub, some unexpressed thought vaguely puzzled me. That thought continued to bother me while I slipped from my clothing. There is, in my bathroom, a full-length mirror; and not till I was passing it did my feeling of unease receive expression.

"For I glanced at my naked body in the mirror, and such a shock of utter horror froze me as I can never again experience on earth.

"What I saw in the mirror was a massive, shaggy, beast-like man of fifty thousand years ago!

"I can not relate the rest of that fateful day. I tried to convince myself that I was the victim of an optical illusion. Perhaps my dreams had become so vivid that they persisted even in my waking hours. My mind may have temporarily given way, I thought, and made me a victim of hallucination.

"But it was all in vain. The mirror did not lie. Each time that I returned to it, drawn by a morbid curiosity, the same appalling figure leered back at me, ape-like, brutish. Slowly the bitter truth forced its way in, though I tried to evade it. Some powerful element in the Kappa-ray, or some unknown organic change that it had influenced in my physical system, was causing my body to revert, to follow my brain as it went back through the ages in the trail of my ancestral lives. I had played with mysterious forces and I was paying the penalty. A physiological atavism or throwback kept pace with the transformation of my mind.

"Shuddering, sickened, I gave way to a frenzy. I raged and stormed around like a trapped animal. My hate concentrated on the Kappa-ray. That was the source of all my misfortune. But at least I could prevent this abominable devolution from going any farther. Perhaps I might even be able to regain my old self when the source of that malignant energy was destroyed. And so, hardly realizing what damage I did and caring less, I kicked the Kappa-ray box across the room, smashed it, trampled it under my feet and ground it into wreckage. Even though I could never again become as I was, yet I would check this degradation before it went farther and before it was too late.

"I do not know how long the madness ruled me. It must have been far into the

night that I finally managed to drop into the deep slumber of exhaustion.

"*And that night I dreamed again!* I re-lived a fierce, nomadic life in southern Italy, followed the first glacier as it retreated north, hunted the mammoth, and then roamed anew through the valleys of central Europe in the warm days before the glaciers came.

"When I wakened at dawn, I was beyond any paroxysms of despair. An apathy came upon me. I walked with dull and heavy tread, listlessly pondered over my fate. I realized now that the Kappa-ray had done its fatal work, and that I had saturated myself in an energy which I no longer had power to control. Whatever changes the ray had begun to make in my brain and my body were proceeding as freely as if they were a natural part of me.

"I could only hope that the effect of the ray would wear off in time. Sedatives, drugs, opiates, alexipharmics—I tried them all and without success. Nightly I lived backward through obscure dawn ages. Daily I wakened to find hideous and subtle changes metamorphosing me into a prehistoric creature. And what faint hope I had held died in my heart when I discovered that the rate of my nocturnal return to former life was accelerating with ever-increasing rapidity. At first I had spanned a few decades in a night, then it became a few centuries, now I bridged thousands and tens of thousands of years each time that I slept.

"I followed primitive man when he crept out of Asia half a million years ago. I lived in a luxuriant land that is now the desert of Gobi. Earth itself underwent great transformations. A continent sank under the waves, another one rose from the Pacific deep. Beasts that no living man has seen appeared in growing numbers, the curious vegetation of vanished eras became my habitat. There were vast saurians on land, ferocious nightmares of air, gigantic marine reptiles and monsters that battled in the warm seas.

"And always, too, there came a hotter, damper climate upon earth. Swamps and marshes became more numerous. Tropical jungles flourished everywhere, with weird, conical trees and hundred-foot ferns and evil flowers growing to incredible heights.

"SO THE years mounted by millions and the geologic ages were born again in my dreams and drifted on like a camera film run backward. The Carboniferous Age became an era of the future, the giant beasts of land decreased in number, steaming jungles and poisonous marshes covered what ground lay above water. The seas grew almost boiling. Terrific storms and deluges of hissing rain swept the globe. Not a single vertebrate now roamed upon land, only a few ephemeral moths winged their brief way through air, moths far larger than any we know, soft, immense, and spotted with gold, scarlet, indigo. But even these passed away; and life swarmed only in the almost universal sea.

"How long I have retrogressed in years I do not know, but it must be millions upon millions, beyond any computation. And it has been not only a dream that came to me, but a reality overshadowed by abysmal terror. My brain has tottered on the brink of madness and I am so far degenerated physically that for three nights I have been taking powerful injections to keep me awake. I fear another vision more than I fear death."

The husky choking voice trailed away in a low gurgle. Over me as the hours waned there had been creeping a nausea, a kind of revulsion against my loathsome acquaintance and his mad story. A perspiration had broken out all over me, and

I was about to make a hasty departure when that disgusting voice continued but in a more uncertain and throatily tired way.

"That last dream—Ugh! I shall never forget it. It haunts all my thoughts and hovers deep within me like an evil incubus ready to descend whenever I weaken.

"Dim sunlight filtered down through water that was thick with sediment and vile with elementary life. In masses of subaqueous growths lurked nasty pulpy things. The black ooze beneath heaved with soft, wriggling forms—gastropods, univalves, protozoa, cephalopods, infusoria, animalcules, and gelatinous forms of a myriad other kinds. A shadow enveloped me—I stared up. Not far above, a giant cephalopod settled toward me, its beak open, innumerable suckers quivering on tentacles that were mushy as worms. I moved slowly aside—and found myself enveloped in the ichorous filaments of a gigantic and viscous jelly-fish. I do not know what happened—I do not wish to know. Ugh! I can not convey the vertigo caused by that sticky stuff—and the clammy life-forms that originally rose in the ancient seas that once covered earth."

The voice trailed away and died, and silence descended stealthily. It seemed to me that the invalid's figure had relaxed, and I thought his head fell back. I did not wait to make sure as I stiffly stood up, for I felt uneasy, yes, and slightly afraid. I do not know why it was, but even as I recoiled physically from the stranger, so my spirit shrank as from a thing unclean or accursed. Trembling a little, I steadied myself and paced down the aisle after the briefest of muttered phrases, to which I heard no answer, if indeed my acquaintance made one.

I had about reached the vestibule when a peculiar sound impinged on my consciousness. I paid no attention to it, and tried to quicken my step. My hand was outstretched toward the door, I believe, when that primeval cry froze me in my place and brought me facing about. It was a whispered scream that died away hideously; a sub-human, sub-animal wordless gurgle, like the death rattle in the throat of a drowning person.

Alfred Kramer may have dreamed his last dream. Psychologists tell us that the subconscious mind may work at abnormal speed when the conscious mind is at rest; and it is at least possible that a lifetime's visions paraded through the fitful slumber of Alfred Kramer during those long seconds that I required in approaching the door. I do not know. And it may be true also that I was temporarily insane. Again, I do not know. But the sight that met my eyes when I whirled about could have been merciful only to madness. One may preserve an equilibrium in a completely normal world; and a madman would find, I suppose, a certain unity in his completely abnormal world; but to face the abnormal in the midst of everyday life, to find the incredible exchanging place with the usual, that is to unite insanity with sanity and make one doubt whether normality exists at all.

For when I spun around, I saw that Alfred Kramer had somehow risen to his feet. And as I stared in his direction, a frightful change took place.

His hands dropped from his wrists and thudded to the floor. His face suddenly went awry, slipped, melted away. The clothing squirmed, bulged, ripped off.

And now I knew the meaning of those motionless lips and that pasty face. It was a mask that I had been watching.

Swaying horribly for an ageless second, what was left of Alfred Kramer shook convulsively and collapsed.

On the floor lay a writhing mass of protoplasmic slime.

Frankenstein

By MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT SHELLEY

The Story Thus Far

ROBERT WALTON, captain of a ship seeking a passage through the Arctic Ocean, saw a low carriage, fixed on a sledge and drawn by dogs, pass over the ice-field to the north. In it sat a being which had the shape of a man, but apparently of gigantic stature. The next morning, after the ice had broken, he rescued from an ice-field another man, greatly emaciated. Only one of his dogs remained alive, for he had been marooned for some time. The man was Victor Frankenstein, a young scientist, who related to Captain Walton the incredible story of his life and how he came to be on the ice-floe.

Frankenstein had lived in Geneva with his father and his adopted sister, Elizabeth, to whom he was betrothed. His father sent him to school at Ingolstadt with his chum, Henry Clerval. There he progressed in his studies of natural science to such a point that he learned to create life.

Without taking Clerval into his secret, Frankenstein created a monster, eight feet tall and human in appearance, taking his materials from graveyards, slaughter-houses and dissecting-rooms. The monster was so terrible to look upon that Frankenstein fled from it, and the monster escaped.

Abandoned by its creator, the monster made its way to the vicinity of Frankenstein's home, where he murdered Frankenstein's younger brother, William.

Frankenstein met the monster in a hut in the Alps, and there the monster told him how he had learned to talk by observing a peasant family for many months, and how he had changed from a being with good impulses to a malevolent demon because when he revealed himself to the eyes of the peasants by entering their cottage, they had been so horrified by his frightful appearance that they beat him with sticks and drove him away; and all men's hands were raised against the hideous monster.

The monster offered to go to the wilds of South America, away from humankind, if Frankenstein would create a female companion for him, and threatened that if Frankenstein refused, he would destroy not only Frankenstein, but also his family. Horrified, the young

This story began in WEIRD TALES for May.

scientist escaped to England, with his companion, Henry Clerval. The monster followed, and, infuriated by Frankenstein's refusal to create a female companion for him, murdered Clerval.

Frankenstein, after months of brooding, decided to marry his childhood companion, Elizabeth, but on their wedding night the monster murdered Elizabeth. Frankenstein's father died from the shock of Elizabeth's death, and Frankenstein himself was confined for many months in a madman's dungeon. On his release, he determined to devote the rest of his life to seeking out and destroying the monster he had created.

CHAPTER 24

My present situation was one in which all voluntary thought was swallowed up and lost. I was hurried away by fury; revenge alone endowed me with strength and composure; it molded my feelings, and allowed me to be calculating and calm, at periods when otherwise delirium or death would have been my portion.

My first resolution was to quit Geneva for ever; my country, which, when I was happy and beloved, was dear to me, now, in my adversity, became hateful. I provided myself with a sum of money, together with a few jewels which had belonged to my mother, and departed.

And now my wanderings began, which are to cease but with life. I have traversed a vast portion of the earth, and have endured all the hardships which travellers in deserts and barbarous countries are wont to meet. How I have lived I hardly know; many times have I stretched my failing limbs upon the sandy plain and prayed for death. But revenge kept me alive; I dared not die and leave my adversary in being.

When I quitted Geneva my first labor was to gain some clue by which I might trace the steps of my fiendish enemy. But my plan was unsettled; and I wandered many hours round the confines of the town, uncertain what path I should pursue. As night approached, I found myself at the entrance of the cemetery where William, Elizabeth, and my father reposed. I entered it and approached the tomb which marked their graves. Everything was silent, except the leaves of the trees, which were gently agitated by the wind; the night was nearly dark; and the scene would have been solemn and affecting even to an uninterested observer.

The deep grief which this scene had at first excited quickly gave way to rage and despair. They were dead, and I lived; their murderer also lived, and to destroy him I must drag out my weary existence. I knelt on the grass and kissed the earth, and with quivering lips exclaimed, "By the sacred earth on which I kneel, by the shades that wander near me, by the deep and eternal grief that I feel, I swear; and by thee, O Night, and the spirits that preside over thee, to pursue the demon who caused this misery until he or I shall perish in mortal conflict. For this purpose I will preserve my life: to execute this dear revenge will I again behold the sun and tread the green herbage of earth, which otherwise should vanish from my eyes for ever. And I call on you, spirits of the dead; and on you, wandering ministers of vengeance, to aid and conduct me in my work. Let the cursed and hellish monster drink deep of agony; let him feel the despair that now torments me."

I was answered through the stillness of night by a loud and fiendish laugh. It rung on my ears long and heavily; the mountains re-echoed it, and I felt as if all hell surrounded me with mockery and laughter. The laughter died away; when a well-known and abhorred voice, appar-

ently close to my ear, addressed me in an audible whisper—"I am satisfied: miserable wretch! you have determined to live, and I am satisfied."

I darted towards the spot from which the sound proceeded; but the devil eluded my grasp. Suddenly the broad disk of the moon arose and shone full upon his ghastly and distorted shape as he fled with more than mortal speed.

I pursued him; and for many months this has been my task. Guided by a slight clue I followed the windings of the Rhone, but vainly. The blue Mediterranean appeared; and, by a strange chance, I saw the fiend enter by night and hide himself in a vessel bound for the Black Sea. I took my passage in the same ship; but he escaped, I know not how.

Amidst the wilds of Tartary and Russia, although he still evaded me, I have ever followed in his track. Sometimes the peasants, scared by this horrid apparition, informed me of his path; sometimes he himself, who feared that if I lost all trace of him I should despair and die, left some mark to guide me. The snows descended on my head, and I saw the print of his huge step on the white plain. Cold, want, and fatigue were the least pains which I was destined to endure; I was cursed by some devil, and carried about with me my eternal hell; yet still a spirit of good followed and directed my steps; and, when I most murmured, would suddenly extricate me from seemingly insurmountable difficulties. Sometimes, when nature, overcome by hunger, sunk under the exhaustion, a repast was prepared for me in the desert that restored and inspirited me. The fare was, indeed, coarse, such as the peasants of the country ate; but I will not doubt that it was set there by the spirits that I had invoked to aid me. Often, when all was dry, the heavens cloudless, and I was parched by thirst, a slight cloud would bedim the sky, shed the few drops that revived me, and vanish.

I FOLLOWED, when I could, the courses of the rivers; but the demon generally avoided these, as it was here that the population of the country chiefly collected. In other places human beings were seldom seen; and I generally subsisted on the wild animals that crossed my path. I had money with me, and gained the friendship of the villagers by distributing it; or I brought with me some food that I had killed, which, after taking a small part, I always presented to those who had provided me with fire and utensils for cooking.

My life, as it passed thus, was indeed hateful to me, and it was during sleep alone that I could taste joy. O blessed sleep! often, when most miserable, I sank to repose, and my dreams lulled me even to rapture. The spirits that guarded me had provided these moments, or rather hours, of happiness, that I might retain strength to fulfil my pilgrimage. Deprived of this respite, I should have sunk under my hardships. During the day I was sustained and inspirited by the hope of night: for in sleep I saw my friends, my wife, and my beloved country; again I saw the benevolent countenance of my father, heard the silver tones of my Elizabeth's voice, and beheld Clerval enjoying health and youth. Often, when wearied by a toilsome march, I persuaded myself that I was dreaming until night should come, and that I should then enjoy reality in the arms of my dearest friends. What agonizing fondness did I feel for them! how did I cling to their dear forms, as sometimes they haunted even my waking hours, and persuaded myself that they still lived! At such moments vengeance, that burned within me, died in my heart, and I pursued my path towards the de-

struction of the demon more as a task enjoined by heaven, as the mechanical impulse of some power of which I was unconscious, than as the ardent desire of my soul.

What his feelings were whom I pursued I can not know. Sometimes, indeed, he left marks in writing on the barks of the trees, or cut in stone, that guided me and instigated my fury. "My reign is not yet over" (these words were legible in one of these inscriptions); "you live, and my power is complete. Follow me; I seek the everlasting ices of the north, where you will feel the misery of cold and frost to which I am impassive. You will find near this place, if you follow not too tardily, a dead hare; eat and be refreshed. Come on, my enemy; we have yet to wrestle for our lives; but many hard and miserable hours must you endure until that period shall arrive."

As I still pursued my journey to the northward, the snows thickened and the cold increased in a degree almost too severe to support. The peasants were shut up in their hovels, and only a few of the most hardy ventured forth to seize the animals whom starvation had forced from their hiding-places to seek for prey. The rivers were covered with ice and no fish could be procured; and thus I was cut off from my chief article of maintenance.

The triumph of my enemy increased with the difficulty of my labors. One inscription that he left was in these words: —"Prepare! your toils only begin: wrap yourself in furs and provide food; for we shall soon enter upon a journey where your sufferings will satisfy my everlasting hatred."

My courage and perseverance were invigorated by these scoffing words; I resolved not to fail in my purpose; and, calling on Heaven to support me, I continued with unabated fervor to traverse immense deserts until the ocean appeared at a distance and formed the utmost boundary of the horizon. Oh! how unlike it was to the blue seas of the south! Covered with ice, it was only to be distinguished from land by its superior wildness and ruggedness. The Greeks wept for joy when they beheld the Mediterranean from the hills of Asia, and hailed with rapture the boundary of their toils. I did not weep; but I knelt down and, with a full heart, thanked my guiding spirit for conducting me in safety to the place where I hoped, notwithstanding my adversary's gibe, to meet and grapple with him.

Some weeks before this period I had procured a sledge and dogs, and thus traversed the snows with inconceivable speed. I know not whether the fiend possessed the same advantages; but I found that, as before I had daily lost ground in the pursuit, I now gained on him: so much so that, when I first saw the ocean, he was but one day's journey in advance, and I hoped to intercept him before he should reach the beach. With new courage, therefore, I pressed on, and in two days arrived at a wretched hamlet on the seashore.

I inquired of the inhabitants concerning the fiend, and gained accurate information. A gigantic monster, they said, had arrived the night before, armed with a gun and many pistols, putting to flight the inhabitants of a solitary cottage through fear of his terrific appearance. He had carried off their store of winter food, and placing it in a sledge, to draw which he had seized on a numerous drove of trained dogs, he had harnessed them, and the same night, to the joy of the horror-struck villagers, had pursued his journey across the sea in a direction that led to no land; and they conjectured that he must speedily be destroyed by the break-

ing of the ice or frozen by the eternal frosts.

On hearing this information, I suffered a temporary access of despair. He had escape me; and I must commence a destructive and almost endless journey across the mountainous ices of the ocean —amidst cold that few of the inhabitants could long endure, and which I, the native of a genial and sunny climate, could not hope to survive. Yet at the idea that the fiend should live and be triumphant, my rage and vengeance returned, and, like a mighty tide, overwhelmed every other feeling. After a slight repose, during which the spirits of the dead hovered round and instigated me to toil and revenge, I prepared for my journey.

I exchanged my land-sledge for one fashioned for the inequalities of the Frozen Ocean; and purchasing a plentiful stock of provisions, I departed from land.

I can not guess how many days have passed since then; but I have endured misery which nothing but the eternal sentiment of a just retribution burning within my heart could have enabled me to support. Immense and rugged mountains of ice often barred up my passage, and I often heard the thunder of the ground sea which threatened my destruction. But again the frost came and made the paths of the sea secure.

By the quantity of provision which I had consumed, I should guess that I had passed three weeks in this journey; and the continual protraction of hope, returning back upon the heart, often wrung bitter drops of despondency and grief from my eyes. Despair had indeed almost secured her prey, and I should soon have sunk beneath this misery. Once, after the poor animals that conveyed me had with incredible toil gained the summit of a sloping ice-mountain, and one, sinking under his fatigue, died, I viewed the expanse before me with anguish, when suddenly my eye caught a dark speck upon the dusky plain. I strained my sight to discover what it could be, and uttered a wild cry of ecstasy when I distinguished a sledge and the distorted proportions of a well-known form within. Oh! with what a burning gush did hope revisit my heart! warm tears filled my eyes, which I hastily wiped away that they might not intercept the view I had of the demon; but still my sight was dimmed by the burning drops until, giving way to the emotions that oppressed me, I wept aloud.

But this was not the time for delay: I disencumbered the dogs of their dead companion, gave them a plentiful portion of food; and, after an hour's rest, which was absolutely necessary, and yet which was bitterly irksome to me, I continued my route. The sledge was still visible; nor did I again lose sight of it except at the moments when for a short time some ice-rock concealed it with its intervening crags. I indeed perceptibly gained on it; and when, after nearly two days' journey, I beheld my enemy at no more than a mile distant, my heart bounded within me.

But now, when I appeared almost within grasp of my foe, my hopes were suddenly extinguished, and I lost all traces of him more utterly than I had ever done before. A ground sea was heard; the thunder of its progress, as the waters rolled and swelled beneath me, became every moment more ominous and terrific. I pressed on, but in vain. The wind arose; the sea roared; and, as with the mighty shock of an earthquake, it split and cracked with a tremendous and overwhelming sound. The work was soon finished: in a few minutes a tumultuous sea rolled between me and my enemy, and I was left drifting on a scattered piece of ice, that was continually lessening, and thus preparing for me a hideous death.

In this manner many appalling hours passed; several of my dogs died; and I myself was about to sink under the accumulation of distress when I saw your vessel riding at anchor, and holding forth to me hopes of succor and life. I had no conception that vessels ever came so far north, and was astounded at the sight.

I quickly destroyed part of my sledge to construct oars; and by these means was enabled, with infinite fatigue, to move my ice-raft in the direction of your ship. I had determined, if you were going southward, still to trust myself to the mercy of the seas rather than abandon my purpose. I hoped to induce you to grant me a boat with which I could pursue my enemy. But your direction was northward. You took me on board when my vigor was exhausted, and I should soon have sunk under my multiplied hardships into a death which I still dread—for my task is unfulfilled.

Oh! when will my guiding spirit, in conducting me to the demon, allow me the rest I so much desire; or must I die and he yet live? If I do, swear to me, Walton, that he shall not escape; that you will seek him and satisfy my vengeance in his death. And do I dare to ask of you to undertake my pilgrimage, to endure the hardships that I have undergone? No; I am not so selfish. Yet, when I am dead, if he should appear; if the ministers of vengeance should conduct him to you, swear that he shall not live—swear that he shall not triumph over my accumulated woes, and survive to add to the list of his dark crimes. He is eloquent and persuasive; and once his words had even power over my heart: but trust him not. His soul is as hellish as his form, full of treachery and fiend-like malice. Hear him not; call on the names of William, Justine, Clerval, Elizabeth, my father, and of the wretched Victor, and thrust your sword into his heart. I will hover near and direct the steel aright.

WALTON, *in continuation*

August 26th, 17—.

You have read this strange and terrific story, Margaret; and do you not feel your blood congeal with horror like that which even now curdles mine? Sometimes, seized with sudden agony, he could not continue his tale; at others, his voice broken, yet piercing, uttered with difficulty the words so replete with anguish. His fine and lovely eyes were now lighted up with indignation, now subdued to downcast sorrow, and quenched in infinite wretchedness. Sometimes he commanded his countenance and tones, and related the most horrible incidents with a tranquil voice, suppressing every mark of agitation; then, like a volcano bursting forth, his face would suddenly change to an expression of the wildest rage, as he shrieked out imprecations on his persecutor.

His tale is connected, and told with an appearance of the simplest truth; yet I own to you that the letters of Felix and Safie, which he showed me, and the apparition of the monster seen from our ship, brought to me a greater conviction of the truth of his narrative than his asseverations, however earnest and connected. Such a monster has then really existence! I can not doubt it; yet I am lost in surprize and admiration. Sometimes I endeavored to gain from Frankenstein the particulars of his creature's formation: but on this point he was impenetrable.

"Are you mad, my friend?" said he; "or whither does your senseless curiosity lead you? Would you also create for yourself and the world a demoniacal enemy? Peace, peace! learn my miseries, and do not seek to increase your own."

Frankenstein discovered that I made notes concerning his history: he asked to see them, and then himself corrected and augmented them in many places; but principally in giving the life and spirit to the conversations he held with his enemy. "Since you have preserved my narration," said he, "I would not that a mutilated one should go down to posterity."

Thus has a week passed away, while I have listened to the strangest tale that ever imagination formed. My thoughts, and every feeling of my soul, have been drunk up by the interest for my guest, which this tale, and his own elevated and gentle manners, have created. I wish to soothe him; yet can I counsel one so infinitely miserable, so destitute of every hope of consolation, to live? Oh, no! the only joy that he can now know will be when he composes his shattered spirit to peace and death. Yet he enjoys one comfort, the offspring of solitude and delirium: he believes that, when in dreams he holds converse with his friends and derives from that communion consolation for his miseries or excitements to his vengeance, they are not the creations of his fancy, but the beings themselves who visit him from the regions of a remote world. This faith gives a solemnity to his reveries that render them to me almost as imposing and interesting as truth.

Our conversations are not always confined to his own history and misfortunes. On every point of general literature he displays unbounded knowledge and a quick and piercing apprehension. His eloquence is forcible and touching; nor can I hear him, when he relates a pathetic incident, or endeavors to move the passions of pity or love, without tears. What a glorious creature must he have been in the days of his prosperity when he is thus noble and god-like in ruin! He feels his worth and the greatness of his fall.

"When younger," said he, "I believed myself destined for some great enterprise. My feelings are profound; but I possessed a coolness of judgment that fitted me for illustrious achievements. This sentiment of the worth of my nature supported me when others would have been oppressed; for I deemed it criminal to throw away in useless grief those talents that might be useful to my fellow-creatures. When I reflected on the work I had completed, no less a one than the creation of a sensitive and rational animal, I could not rank myself with the herd of common projectors. But this thought, which supported me in the commencement of my career, now serves only to plunge me lower in the dust. All my speculations and hopes are as nothing; and, like the archangel who aspired to omnipotence, I am chained in an eternal hell. My imagination was vivid, yet my powers of analysis and application were intense; by the union of these qualities I conceived the idea and executed the creation of a man. Even now I can not recollect without passion my reveries while the work was incomplete. I trod heaven in my thoughts, now exulting in my powers, now burning with the idea of their effects. From my infancy I was imbued with high hopes and a lofty ambition; but how am I sunk! Oh! my friend, if you had known me as I once was you would not recognize me in this state of degradation. Despondency rarely visited my heart; a high destiny seemed to bear me on until I fell, never, never again to rise."

Must I then lose this admirable being? I have longed for a friend; I have sought one who would sympathize with and love me. Behold, on these desert seas I have found such a one; but I fear I have gained him only to know his value and lose him. I would reconcile him to life, but he repulses the idea.

"I thank you, Walton," he said, "for your kind intentions towards so miserable a wretch; but when you speak of new ties and fresh affections, think you that any can replace those who are gone? Can any man be to me as Clerval was; or any woman another Elizabeth? Even where the affections are not strongly moved by any superior excellence, the companions of our childhood always possess a certain power over our minds which hardly any later friend can obtain. They know our infantine dispositions, which, however they may be afterwards modified, are never eradicated; and they can judge of our actions with more certain conclusions as to the integrity of our motives. A sister or a brother can never, unless indeed such symptoms have been shown early, suspect the other of fraud or false dealing, when another friend, however strongly he may be attached, may, in spite of himself, be contemplated with suspicion. But I enjoyed friends, dear not only through habit and association, but from their own merits; and wherever I am the soothing voice of my Elizabeth and the conversation of Clerval will be ever whispered in my ear. They are dead, and but one feeling in such a solitude can persuade me to preserve my life. If I were engaged in any high undertaking or design, fraught with extensive utility to my fellow-creatures, then could I live to fulfil it. But such is not my destiny; I must pursue and destroy the being to whom I gave existence; then my lot on earth will be fulfilled, and I may die."

September 2nd.

MY BELOVED SISTER,—I write to you encompassed by peril and ignorant whether I am ever doomed to see again dear England, and the dearer friends that inhabit it. I am surrounded by mountains of ice which admit of no escape and threaten every moment to crush my vessel. The brave fellows whom I have persuaded to be my companions look towards me for aid; but I have none to bestow. There is something terribly appalling in our situation, yet my courage and hopes do not desert me. Yet it is terrible to reflect that the lives of all these men are endangered through me. If we are lost, my mad schemes are the cause.

And what, Margaret, will be the state of your mind? You will not hear of my destruction, and you will anxiously await my return. Years will pass, and you will have visitings of despair, and yet be tortured by hope. Oh! my beloved sister, the sickening failing of your heartfelt expectations is, in prospect, more terrible to me than my own death. But you have a husband and lovely children; you may be happy: Heaven bless you and make you so!

My unfortunate guest regards me with the tenderest compassion. He endeavors to fill me with hope; and talks as if life were a possession which he valued. He reminds me how often the same accidents have happened to other navigators who have attempted this sea, and, in spite of myself, he fills me with cheerful auguries. Even the sailors feel the power of his eloquence: when he speaks they no longer despair; he rouses their energies and, while they hear his voice, they believe these vast mountains of ice are mole-hills which will vanish before the resolutions of man. These feelings are transitory; each day of expectation delayed fills them with fear, and I almost dread a mutiny caused by this despair.

September 5th.

A SCENE has just passed of such uncommon interest that although it is highly probable that these papers may

never reach you, yet I can not forbear recording it.

We are still surrounded by mountains of ice, still in imminent danger of being crushed in their conflict. The cold is excessive, and many of my unfortunate comrades have already found a grave amidst this scene of desolation. Frankenstein has daily declined in health: a feverish fire still glimmers in his eyes; but he is exhausted, and when suddenly roused to any exertion he speedily sinks again into apparent lifelessness.

I mentioned in my last letter the fears I entertained of a mutiny. This morning, as I sat watching the wan countenance of my friend—his eyes half closed, and his limbs hanging listlessly—I was roused by half a dozen of the sailors who demanded admission into the cabin. They entered, and their leader addressed me. He told me that he and his companions had been chosen by the other sailors to come in deputation to me, to make me a requisition which, in justice, I could not refuse. We were immured in ice and should probably never escape; but they feared that if, as was possible, the ice should dissipate, and a free passage be opened, I should be rash enough to continue my voyage and lead them into fresh dangers after they might happily have surmounted this. They insisted, therefore, that I should engage with a solemn promise that if the vessel should be freed I would instantly direct my course southward.

This speech troubled me. I had not despaired; nor had I yet conceived the idea of returning if set free. Yet could I, in justice, or even in possibility, refuse this demand? I hesitated before I answered; when Frankenstein, who had at first been silent, and, indeed, appeared hardly to have force enough to attend, now roused himself; his eyes sparkled, and his cheeks flushed with momentary vigor. Turning towards the men he said—

"What do you mean? What do you demand of your captain? Are you then so easily turned from your design? Did you not call this a glorious expedition? And wherefore was it glorious? Not because the way was smooth and placid as a southern sea, but because it was full of dangers and terror; because at every new incident your fortitude was to be called forth and your courage exhibited; because danger and death surrounded it, and these you were to brave and overcome. For this was it a glorious, for this was it an honorable undertaking. You were hereafter to be hailed as the benefactors of your species; your names adored as belonging to brave men who encountered death for honor and the benefit of mankind. And now, behold, with the first imagination of danger, or, if you will, the first mighty and terrific trial of your courage, you shrink away, and are content to be handed down as men who had not strength enough to endure cold and peril; and so, poor souls, they were chilly and returned to their warm firesides. Why, that requires not this preparation; ye need not have come thus far, and dragged your captain to the shame of a defeat, merely to prove yourselves cowards. Oh! be men, or be more than men. Be steady to your purposes and firm as a rock. This ice is not made of such stuff as your hearts may be; it is mutable and can not withstand you if you say that it shall not. Do not return to your families with the stigma of disgrace marked on your brows. Return as heroes who have fought and conquered, and who know not what it is to turn their backs on the foe."

He spoke this with a voice so modulated to the different feelings expressed in his speech, with an eye so full of lofty design and heroism, that can you wonder

that these men were moved? They looked at one another and were unable to reply. I spoke; I told them to retire and consider of what had been said: that I would not lead them farther north if they strenuously desired the contrary; but that I hoped that, with reflection, their courage would return.

They retired, and I turned towards my friend; but he was sunk in languor and almost deprived of life.

How all this will terminate I know not; but I had rather die than return shamefully — my purpose unfulfilled. Yet I fear such will be my fate; the men, unsupported by ideas of glory and honor, can never willingly continue to endure their present hardships.

September 7th.

THE die is cast; I have consented to return if we are not destroyed. Thus are my hopes blasted by cowardice and indecision; I come back ignorant and disappointed. It requires more philosophy than I possess to bear this injustice with patience.

September 12th.

IT IS past; I am returning to England. I have lost my hopes of utility and glory; —I have lost my friend. But I will endeavor to detail these bitter circumstances to you, my dear sister; and while I am wafted towards England, and towards you, I will not despond.

September 9th, the ice began to move, and roarings like thunder were heard at a distance as the islands split and cracked in every direction. We were in the most imminent peril; but, as we could only remain passive, my chief attention was occupied by my unfortunate guest, whose illness increased in such a degree that he was entirely confined to his bed. The ice cracked behind us, and was driven with force towards the north; a breeze sprung from the west, and on the 11th the passage towards the south became perfectly free. When the sailors saw this, and that their return to their native country was apparently assured, a shout of tumultuous joy broke from them, loud and long-continued.

Frankenstein, who was dozing, awoke and asked the cause of the tumult. "They shout," I said, "because they will soon return to England."

"Do you then really return?"

"Alas! yes; I can not withstand their demands. I can not lead them unwillingly to danger, and I must return."

"Do so, if you will; but I will not. You may give up your purpose, but mine is assigned to me by Heaven, and I dare not. I am weak; but surely the spirits who assist my vengeance will endow me with sufficient strength." Saying this, he endeavored to spring from the bed, but the exertion was too great for him; he fell back and fainted.

It was long before he was restored; and I often thought that life was entirely extinct. At length he opened his eyes; he breathed with difficulty, and was unable to speak. The surgeon gave him a composing draft and ordered us to leave him undisturbed. In the meantime he told me that my friend had certainly not many hours to live.

His sentence was pronounced, and I could only grieve and be patient. I sat by his bed watching him; his eyes were closed, and I thought he slept; but presently he called to me in a feeble voice, and, bidding me come near, said—"Alas! the strength I relied on is gone; I feel that I shall soon die, and he, my enemy and persecutor, may still be in being. Think not, Walton, that in the last moments of my existence I feel that burning hatred

and ardent desire of revenge I once expressed; but I feel myself justified in desiring the death of my adversary. During these last days I have been occupied in examining my past conduct; nor do I find it blamable.

"In a fit of enthusiastic madness I created a rational creature, and was bound towards him, to assure, as far as was in my power, his happiness and well-being. This was my duty; but there was another still paramount to that. My duties towards the beings of my own species had greater claims to my attention, because they included a greater proportion of happiness or misery. Urged by this view, I refused, and I did right in refusing, to create a companion for the first creature. He showed unparalleled malignity and selfishness, in evil: he destroyed my friends; he devoted to destruction beings who possessed exquisite sensations, happiness, and wisdom; nor do I know where this thirst for vengeance may end. Miserable himself, that he may render no other wretched he ought to die. The task of his destruction was mine, but I have failed. When actuated by selfish and vicious motives I asked you to undertake my unfinished work; and I renew this request now when I am only induced by reason and virtue.

"Yet I can not ask you to renounce your country and friends to fulfil this task; and now that you are returning to England you will have little chance of meeting with him. But the consideration of these points, and the well balancing of what you may esteem your duties, I leave to you; my judgment and ideas are already disturbed by the near approach of death. I dare not ask you to do what I think right, for I may still be misled by passion.

"That he should live to be an instrument of mischief disturbs me; in other respects, this hour, when I momentarily expect my release, is the only happy one which I have enjoyed for several years. The forms of the beloved dead flit before me and I hasten to their arms. Farewell, Walton! Seek happiness in tranquillity and avoid ambition, even if it be only the apparently innocent one of distinguishing yourself in science and discoveries. Yet why do I say this? I have myself been blasted in these hopes, yet another may succeed."

His voice became fainter as he spoke; and at length, exhausted by his effort, he sunk into silence. About half an hour afterwards he attempted again to speak, but was unable; he pressed my hand feebly, and his eyes closed for ever, while the irradiation of a gentle smile passed away from his lips.

Margaret, what comment can I make on the untimely extinction of this glorious spirit? What can I say that will enable you to understand the depth of my sorrow? All that I should express would be inadequate and feeble. My tears flow; my mind is overshadowed by a cloud of disappointment. But I journey towards England, and I may there find consolation.

I am interrupted. What do these sounds portend? It is midnight; the breeze blows fairly, and the watch on deck scarcely stir. Again; there is a sound as of a human voice, but coarser; it comes from the cabin where the remains of Frankenstein still lie. I must arise and examine. Good-night, my sister.

GREAT God! what a scene has just taken place! I am yet dizzy with the remembrance of it. I hardly know whether I shall have the power to detail it; yet the tale which I have recorded would be incomplete without this final and wonderful catastrophe.

I entered the cabin where lay the re-

mains of my ill-fated friend. Over him hung a form which I can not find words to describe; gigantic in stature, yet uncouth and distorted in its proportions. As he hung over the coffin his face was concealed by long locks of ragged hair; but one vast hand was extended, in color and apparent texture like that of a mummy. When he heard the sound of my approach he ceased to utter exclamations of grief and horror and sprung towards the window. Never did I behold a vision so horrible as his face, of such loathsome yet appalling hideousness. I shut my eyes involuntarily and endeavored to recollect what were my duties with regard to this destroyer. I called on him to stay.

He paused, looking on me with wonder; and, again turning towards the lifeless form of his creator, he seemed to forget my presence, and every feature and gesture seemed instigated by the wildest rage of some uncontrollable passion.

"That is also my victim!" he exclaimed: "in his murder my crimes are consummated; the miserable series of my being is wound to its close! Oh, Frankenstein! generous and self-devoted being! what does it avail that I now ask thee to pardon me? I, who irretrievably destroyed thee by destroying all thou lovedst. Alas! he is cold, he can not answer me."

His voice seemed suffocated; and my first impulses, which had suggested to me the duty of obeying the dying request of my friend, in destroying his enemy, were now suspended by a mixture of curiosity and compassion. I approached this tremendous being; I dared not again raise my eyes to his face, there was something so scaring and unearthly in his ugliness. I attempted to speak, but the words died away on my lips. The monster continued to utter wild and incoherent self-reproaches. At length I gathered resolution to address him in a pause of the tempest of his passion: "Your repentance," I said, "is now superfluous. If you had listened to the voice of conscience, and heeded the stings of remorse, before you had urged your diabolical vengeance to this extremity, Frankenstein would yet have lived."

"And do you dream?" said the demon; "do you think that I was then dead to agony and remorse?—He," he continued, pointing to the corpse, "he suffered not in the consummation of the deed—oh! not the ten-thousandth portion of the anguish that was mine during the lingering detail of its execution. A frightful selfishness hurried me on, while my heart was poisoned with remorse. Think you that the groans of Clerval were music to my ears? My heart was fashioned to be susceptible of love and sympathy; and when wrenched by misery to vice and hatred it did not endure the violence of the change without torture such as you can not even imagine.

"After the murder of Clerval I returned to Switzerland heart-broken and overcome. I pitied Frankenstein; my pity amounted to horror: I abhorred myself. But when I discovered that he, the author at once of my existence and of its unspeakable torments, dared to hope for happiness; that while he accumulated wretchedness and despair upon me he sought his own enjoyment in feelings and passions from the indulgence of which I was for ever barred, then impotent envy and bitter indignation filled me with an insatiable thirst for vengeance. I recollected my threat and resolved that it should be accomplished. I knew that I was preparing for myself a deadly torture; but I was the slave, not the master, of an impulse which I detested, yet could not disobey. Yet when she died!—nay, then I was not miserable. I had cast off all feeling, sub-

dued all anguish, to riot in the excess of my despair. Evil thenceforth became my good. Urged thus far, I had no choice but to adapt my nature to an element which I had willingly chosen. The completion of my demoniacal design became an insatiable passion. And now it is ended; there is my last victim!"

I was at first touched by the expressions of his misery; yet when I called to mind what Frankenstein had said of his powers of eloquence and persuasion, and when I again cast my eyes on the lifeless form of my friend, indignation was rekindled within me.

"Wretch!" I said, "it is well that you come here to whine over the desolation that you have made. You throw a torch into a pile of buildings; and when they are consumed you sit among the ruins and lament the fall. Hypocritical fiend! if he whom you mourn still lived, still would he be the object, again would he become the prey, of your accursed vengeance. It is not pity that you feel; you lament only because the victim of your malignity is withdrawn from your power."

"Oh, it is not thus—not thus," interrupted the being; "yet such must be the impression conveyed to you by what appears to be the purport of my actions. Yet I seek not a fellow-feeling in my misery. No sympathy may I ever find. When I first sought it, it was the love of virtue, the feelings of happiness and affection with which my whole being overflowed, that I wished to be participated. But now that virtue has become to me a shadow and that happiness and affection are turned into bitter and loathing despair, in what should I seek for sympathy? I am content to suffer alone while my sufferings shall endure: when I die, I am well satisfied that abhorrence and opprobrium should load my memory.

"Once my fancy was soothed with dreams of virtue, of fame, and of enjoyment. Once I falsely hoped to meet with beings who, pardoning my outward form, would love me for the excellent qualities which I was capable of unfolding. I was nourished with high thoughts of honor and devotion. But now crime has degraded me beneath the meanest animal. No guilt, no mischief, no malignity, no misery, can be found comparable to mine. When I run over the frightful catalogue of my sins, I can not believe that I am the same creature whose thoughts were once filled with sublime and transcendent visions of the beauty and the majesty of goodness. But it is even so; the fallen angel becomes a malignant devil. Yet even that enemy of God and man had friends and associates in his desolation; I am alone.

"You, who call Frankenstein your friend, seem to have a knowledge of my crimes and his misfortunes. But in the detail which he gave you of them he could not sum up the hours and months of misery which I endured, wasting in impotent passions. For while I destroyed his hopes, I did not satisfy my own desires. They were for ever ardent and craving; still I desired love and fellowship, and I was still spurned. Was there no injustice in this? Am I to be thought the only criminal when all human kind sinned against me? Why do you not hate Felix who drove his friend from his door with contumely? Why do you not execrate the rustic who sought to destroy the savior of his child? Nay, these are virtuous and immaculate beings! I, the miserable and the abandoned, am an abortion, to be spurned at, and kicked, and trampled on. Even now my blood boils at the recollection of this injustice.

"But it is true that I am a wretch. I have murdered the lovely and the help-

(Please turn to page 846)

THERE is no doubt at all as to which story you, the readers, liked best in our October issue, for you plumped solidly for *The Wand of Doom,* by Jack Williamson. This being the case, you will be glad to learn that Mr. Williamson has written a serial story for you, *Golden Blood,* which reads like a new Rider Haggard masterpiece. This marvelous story will follow immediately after the current serial, *Buccaneers of Venus,* by Otis Adelbert Kline.

George N. Heflick, of Mantua, Ohio, writes to the Eyrie: "Jack Williamson's *The Wand of Doom* is a great piece of science fiction. There are basic laws underlying that story which will cause it to be dragged forth from musty attics one day and hailed as a prophecy. I consider Arlton Eadie's Count Roulette a real character creation of occult fiction, and if the author can write another story around him as fine as *The Eye of Truth,* I should be very glad to see it in an early issue of WEIRD TALES."

Writes Mrs. E. W. Murphy, from Cherrydale, Virginia: "In the last WEIRD TALES was a story I can't think of good enough adjectives to describe—one of the ones that really mean something. I don't have my copy of W. T. with me, and can only identity it right now by saying it was the one about the man who assembled the castle and his lady love by the power of his thought, only to have her turn into a spider. It was a beautiful story, artistic as Poe, and scientific as Wells." [This is, of course, *The Wand of Doom,* by Jack Williamson.—THE EDITORS.]

A letter from W. K. Mashburn, of Houston, Texas, says: "The October issue of W. T. is, in my opinion, one of the best that's come out—cover as well as contents. I think that there are three 'best' stories: Williamson's *The Wand of Doom,* Hamilton's *The Dogs of Doctor Dwann,* and Quinn's *The Heart of Siva.* And then, that cover!"

"I have been a reader of your magazine for many years," writes Clarence W. Smith, of Martinsburg, West Virginia; "so long, in fact, that I can not remember when I read the first one. WEIRD TALES has given me more real pleasure than any other magazine. Its stories are so removed from everyday life that they make one forget all about earthly cares and worries. Of all your authors I most enjoy Mr. Seabury Quinn. I look forward to his stories every month and have often regretted that I have no place to store back copies of the magazine so that I could read Mr. Quinn's thrilling tales of Jules de Grandin again. If you wish to keep me as a reader you must continue to print them."

Reginald A. Pryke, who describes himself as "a voice from Albion," writes from

Chatham, England: "WEIRD TALES is, was, and will be the champion of its class. From the leading story down to the smallest cameo it is far nearer perfection than any magazine I know of. Consider its authors—Quinn, Lovecraft, Benson, Pendarves, Long, Clark Ashton Smith, Burks, Price, Kline—but why continue? All your brilliant crowd of typewriter wallopers deserve a mention—and I forgot Doctor Keller, with his calm, lovable style, his living characters and masterly diction. His tales of the King of Cornwall were delicious. Then there is Arlton Eadie (English?), Kirk Mashburn, a brilliant writer, this. Reprints? Yes and no. I mean, no to such tales as *Dracula, Frankenstein* and *The Wolf-Leader*. Yes to stories from old WEIRD TALES. I have heard of *The Night Wire*—by Arnold, wasn't it? Reprint that and earn a blessing."

James G. Merriman, of Dyersburg, Tennessee, writes to the Eyrie: "I tripped, stumbled, and fell over WEIRD TALES last spring, during a siege of toothache. I forgot my pain, went into a fit of the D. T.'s over my discovery, and made no effort to rise; nor do I ever intend doing so. I bought three issues at the news stand, and then enrolled for a year. I have an idea that it will prove a life sentence. I have been following the debates in your Devil's Forum anent the reprints. Up to this issue I have been able to agree with practically nothing that has been said. I don't want the reprint department discontinued, and I don't want *Dracula,* as I have read it. This month, however, I can vote with the gang on all points. Let's keep reprints and use stories from old WEIRD TALES. And by all means, give us more scientific and interplanetary stuff. I am looking forward with great pleasure to Kline's *Buccaneers of Venus*. I can't understand any one's not liking that sort of thing."

Readers, what is your favorite story in this issue? As stated above, Jack Williamson's fantastic story, *The Wand of Doom,* was your favorite in the October issue. Clark Ashton Smith's bizarre tale, *The Testament of Athammaus,* was your second choice.

My favorite stories in the December WEIRD TALES are:

Story	Remarks
(1)----------	----------
(2)----------	----------
(3)----------	----------

I do not like the following stories:

(1)---------- Why? ----------

(2)---------- ----------

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Coming Next Month

DE GRANDIN lost no time in coming to the point. "Once, years ago, my friend," he said, "on the ancient Djebel Druse—the stronghold of that strange and mystic people who acknowledge neither Turk nor Frenchman as their overlord—I saw you work a miracle. Do you recall? A prisoner had been taken, and——"

"I recall perfectly," the Arab cut in, his deep voice fairly booming through the room. "Yes, I well remember it. But it is not well to do such things promiscuously, my little one. The Ineffable One has His own plans for our goings and comings; to gamble in men's souls is not a game which men should play at."

"Misère de Dieu!" de Grandin cried, "this is no petty game I ask that you should play. Madame Cardener? Her plight is pitiful, I grant; but women's hearts have broken in the past, and they will break till time shall be no more. No, it is not for her I ask this thing, but for the sake of justice. Shall ninety-million-times-damned perfidy vaunt itself in pride at the expense of innocence? 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord,' truly; but consider: Does He not ever act through human agencies when He performs His miracles? Damn yes. If there were any way this poor one's innocence could be established, even after death, I should not be here; but as it is he is enmeshed in webs of treachery. This monstrous-great injustice must not and can not be allowed, my friend."

The Arab stroked his black beard thoughtfully. "I hesitate to do it," he replied, "but for you, my little birdling, and for justice, I shall try."

"We win!" de Grandin cried, rising from his chair and bounding across the room to seize the Arab in his arms and kiss him on both cheeks. "Ha, Satan, thou art stalemated; tomorrow we shall make a monkey of your plans and of the plans of that so evil man who did your work, by damn!" . . .

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By OTIS ADELBERT KLINE

January WEIRD TALES Out December 1

Frankenstein

(Continued from page 842)

less; I have strangled the innocent as they slept, and grasped to death his throat who never injured me or any other living thing. I have devoted my creator, the select specimen of all that is worthy of love and admiration among men, to misery; I have pursued him even to that irremediable ruin. There he lies, white and cold in death. You hate me; but your abhorrence can not equal that with which I regard myself. I look on the hands which executed the deed; I think on the heart in which the imagination of it was conceived, and long for the moment when these hands will meet my eyes, when that imagination will haunt my thoughts no more.

"Fear not that I shall be the instrument of future mischief. My work is nearly complete. Neither yours nor any man's death is needed to consummate the series of my being, and accomplish that which must be done; but it requires my own. Do not think that I shall be slow to perform this sacrifice. I shall quit your vessel on the ice-raft which brought me thither, and shall seek the most northern extremity of the globe; I shall collect my funeral pile and consume to ashes this miserable frame, that its remains may afford no light to any curious and unhallowed wretch who would create such another as I have been. I shall die. I shall no longer feel the agonies which now consume me, or be the prey of feelings unsatisfied, yet unquenched. He is dead who called me into being; and when I shall be no more, the very remembrance of us both will speedily vanish. I shall no longer see the sun or stars, or feel the winds play on my cheeks. Light, feeling, and sense

(Please turn to page 848)

STATEMENT OF THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, CIRCULATION, ETC., REQUIRED BY THE ACT OF CONGRESS OF AUGUST 24, 1912,

Of Weird Tales, published monthly at Indianapolis, Indiana, for October 1, 1932.

State of Illinois }
County of Cook } ss.

Before me, a notary public in and for the State and county aforesaid, personally appeared Wm. R. Sprenger, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the Business Manager of the Weird Tales and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management (and if a daily paper, the circulation), etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption required by the Act of August 24, 1912, embodied in section 411, Postal Laws and Regulations, printed on the reverse of this form, to wit:

1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business manager are:

Publisher—Popular Fiction Publishing Company, 2457 E. Washington St., Indianapolis, Ind.

Editor—Farnsworth Wright, 840 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill.

Managing Editor—None.

Business Manager—William R. Sprenger, 840 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill.

2. That the owner is: (If owned by a corporation, its name and address must be stated and also immediately thereunder the names and addresses of stockholders owning or holding one per cent or more of total amount of stock. If not owned by a corporation, the names and addresses of the individual owners must be given. If owned by a firm, company, or other unincorporated concern, its name and address, as well as those of each individual member must be given.)

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Wm. R. Sprenger, 840 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill.

Farnsworth Wright, 840 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill

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3. That the known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 per cent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: (If there are none, so state). None.

4. That the two paragraphs next above, giving the names of the owners, stockholders, and security holders, if any, contain not only the list of stockholders and security holders as they appear upon the books of the company, but also, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting, is given; also that the said two paragraphs contain statements embracing affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner; and this affiant has no reason to believe that any other person, association, or corporation has any interest, direct or indirect, in the said stock, bonds, or other securities than as so stated by him.

5. That the average number of copies of each issue of this publication sold or distributed, through the mails or otherwise, to paid subscribers during the six months preceding the date shown above is———. (This information is required from daily publications only.)

WM. R. SPRENGER,
Business Manager.

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 28th day of September, 1932. RICHARD S. GOULDEN,
[SEAL] Notary Public.
My commission expires May 3, 1934.

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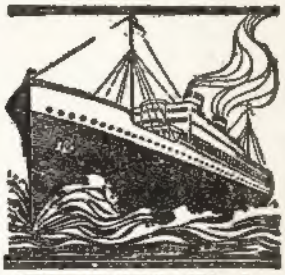

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(Continued from page 846)

will pass away; and in this condition must I find my happiness. Some years ago, when the images which this world affords first opened upon me, when I felt the cheering warmth of summer, and heard the rustling of the leaves and the warbling of the birds, and these were all to me, I should have wept to die; now it is my only consolation. Polluted by crimes, and torn by the bitterest remorse, where can I find rest but in death?

"Farewell! I leave you, and in you the last of human kind whom these eyes will ever behold. Farewell, Frankenstein! If thou wert yet alive, and yet cherished a desire of revenge against me, it would be better satiated in my life than in my destruction. But it was not so; thou didst seek my extinction that I might not cause greater wretchedness; and if yet, in some mode unknown to me, thou hast not ceased to think and feel, thou wouldst not desire against me a vengeance greater than that which I feel. Blasted as thou wert, my agony was still superior to thine; for the bitter sting of remorse will not cease to rankle in my wounds until death shall close them for ever.

"But soon," he cried, with sad and solemn enthusiasm, "I shall die, and what I now feel be no longer felt. Soon these burning miseries will be extinct. I shall ascend my funeral pile triumphantly, and exult in the agony of the torturing flames. The light of that conflagration will fade away; my ashes will be swept into the sea by the winds. My spirit will sleep in peace; or if it thinks, it will not surely think thus. Farewell."

He sprung from the cabin-window, as he said this, upon the ice-raft which lay close to the vessel. He was soon borne away by the waves and lost in darkness and distance.

[THE END]

W. T.—8

ON A sleeping-mat, native style, lay General Jui-yin, at the far side of the room.

O'Neill closed the door silently, and crossed the floor. Except for the cloisonné dragon, the room was quite bare, without luxury. He dropped the rattan on a table, and plucked out his pistol.

At this instant, the sleeping man opened his eyes.

"Lung! How dare you——"

O'Neill jerked with the pistol. An expression of the utmost astonishment leaped into the massive, powerful features of Jui-yin as he saw that this man was not Lung after all.

"Quiet," said O'Neill. "No, I am not Lung. Lung is dead, and you will follow him if you don't lie still. Put your hands outside the covers—quick! That's right."

Reaching up with his free hand, he worked loose the false mustache, and threw off the cap with its dragon insignia. Recognition dawned in the eyes of Jui-yin; recognition, and a flame of gathering fury.

"You!"

"Exactly," said O'Neill. "And now I have you just where I want you, my dear general."

The brutal features before him became suffused with blood, then paled again.

"How did you get here?" snapped the general.

"By virtue of my dragon blood. You did not know that I was a descendant of dragons?" O'Neill lifted one eyebrow, regarded him whimsically. "But you saw me arrive in a green dragon. You should have taken warning. And that airplane is not a present for you at all. It is very far from being yours, just as you are very far from marrying the daughter of Doctor Sanson."

He beamed cheerfully on the yellow man, who was now thoroughly roused.

The face of Jui-yin was a study in fleeting expressions. Fury, chagrin, astonishment, succeeded one another; his lurid eyes narrowed, watching O'Neill like the eyes of an intent tiger. His lip curled in a sneer. . . .

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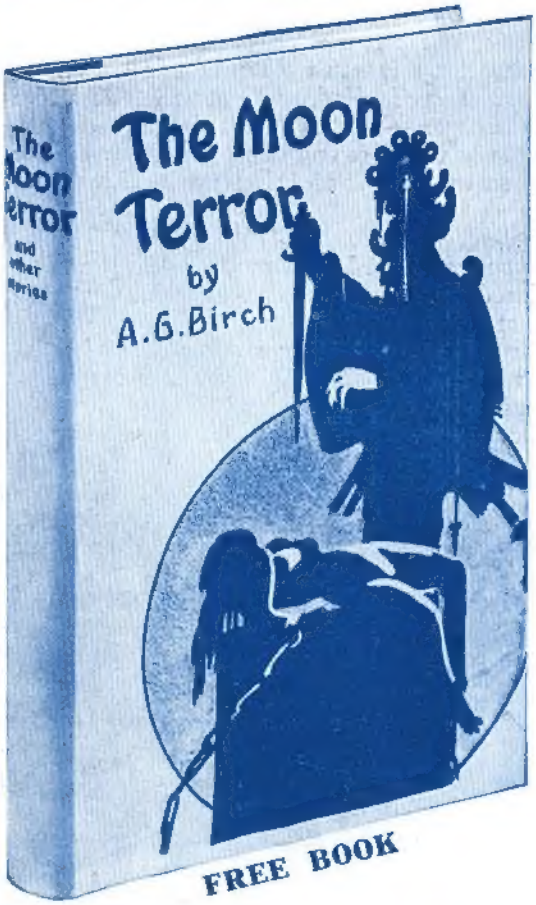

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